Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of Punjab, 1960 - 1995

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Abstract

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The research examines the factors which account for the emergence of ethno-nationalist movements in multi-ethnic and late industrialising societies such as India. The research employs a historical sociological approach to the study of nationalism. Opening with an interrogation of the classic theories of nationalism, the research shows the Eurocentric limitations of these works. By providing an account of the distinctive nature and development of Indian nationalism, it is maintained that the nature, growth, timing and scope of nationalist movements is affected by the level of development and the nature of the state and society in which they emerge.

Using the theoretical framework developed here, the theses seeks to explain the nature and timing of breakaway movements in the Indian subcontinent. By providing an account of the social composition of the Sikh secessionist movement, the research shifts the focus on to the peasantry. Consequently, the study interrogates the social and cultural sphere beyond the English-speaking Indian élite. The role of the widely influential media, such as the vernacular press and cassettes, in ethnic movements is also considered. The hypothesis is that the conjunction of three sets of factors explain the rise of Sikh nationalism. The first is economic, notably the transition to commercial agriculture, the second is the revolution in communication, notably the expansion of vernacular press and cassettes and the third is religious, notably the revolutionary Sikh religious ideology with emphasis on martyrdom. The theses traces the three stage evolution of the Sikhs from a religious congregation into an ethnic community in the nineteenth century and from an ethnic community into a nation in the twentieth century.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

India is a subcontinent, with a population of over 900 million, covering a wide range of ecological zones. The countless linguistic and religious groupings are frequently on the boil, if not engaged in open conflict. The proliferation of ethno-nationalist movements there has generated a growing concern among social scientists in recent years. The aim of this theses is to ascertain the vital conditions and processes which give rise to ethnic conflict in contemporary India, and to place these developments in a broader historical context. The research is also an attempt to recast the theory of nationalism and purge it of its Eurocentric and élitist bias. In my view, an adequate theoretical comprehension of nationalism outside Europe has to come to terms with Asian institutions and history.

Any attempt to encompass so vast a theme is bound to be selective. My research therefore concentrates on the Punjab and gives a detailed account of the Sikh movement for an independent state in India. My choice of the Sikh case has been influenced by the fact that I belong to the Punjab and am most familiar with its history and events. My interest in the subject was stimulated by the recent turmoil in the Punjab. This involvement may help to explain some of the biases and the choice of the specific case.

As will be apparent to the reader, two books have deeply influenced my comprehension of nationalism. The first book is Benedict Anderson's, *Imagined Communities* and the other book is Barrington Moore Jr.'s classic work, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy.*

I have benefited enormously from the guidance of my tutors, Dr. Alfred Gell and Professor Anthony D. Smith. Apart from the intellectual advice and criticism, Dr. Alfred Gell gave me invaluable support in finding a suitable intellectual environment to carry on this piece of research and Professor Anthony D. Smith went out of his way to assist my efforts for financial assistance. This research would not have been possible without their help and encouragement all through this period. At all stages the support that my family gave me was fundamental and varied.

HARNIK DEOL

Introduction

South Asia today presents a mosaic of artificial administrative entities left behind by the British imperial power. In the half century since Independence, the stability of the post-colonial state in South Asia has been threatened by recurrent and violent conflict between the central authorities and a variety of ethnic minorities. The Muhajir uprising in Pakistan; Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka; tribal insurgency in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts; montagnard irredentism in Indian Kashmir and Sikh separatism in India present a congeries of contemporary breakaway movements in the Indian sub-continent.

India's complex social structure presents a kaleidoscopic cultural universe; a plethora of regional distinctions; a motley complex of traditions; nearly five hundred languages and dialects are spoken by nearly 900 million people.[1] It is indeed remarkable that this broad cultural ensemble is subsumed under a central political authority, which is itself an artificial administrative entity. It is natural for these diverse ethnic groups to assert their cultural identity. The principal bases of identity assertion perceived as threats to the national state in India are religion, language and tribe. Soon after India's independence in 1947, the foremost controversy to push India to the brink of civil disorder was the linguistic issue. However, the carving of territorial units based on language resolved the burning language issue in the 1950s and 1960s. Since the 1980s, it is religious identity assertions, particularly in conjunction with territorial bases, that have afflicted the Indian national state. The Sikh demand for an independent state and the Muslim claims for autonomy in Kashmir are the two foremost movements for political secession in contemporary India, which possess both religious and territorial

[1]Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1994, p.165.

bases. According to one survey, the destruction, in terms of the number of people who have lost their lives and the damage caused to public property, wrought by these conflicts is far worse than the destruction caused by the three Indo-Pakistan wars.[2] These internal wars for political secession are the subject of our study and we take the Sikh movement for sovereignty in India as our central example.

In considering the Sikh unrest, two important facts must be borne in mind. First, Punjab has progressively shrunk in size over the last half century. The Punjab province today occupies only a fraction of the area it occupied before the last half of this century. Secondly, since 1966 the cultural distinctiveness of Punjab is provided by the fact that a majority of its population is Sikh. This fact acquires a particular significance when it is remembered that the Sikhs are a national minority, whilst at the same time enjoying a distinctive history and cultural identity, and consistently claiming a heritage entirely different from that of either Hindus with whom they have no history of antagonism, or from Muslims with whom they have a history of powerful antagonistic struggles. The Sikhs are a people objectively distinct in religion, though not in language, from other ethnic groups in the north, who have succeeded in acquiring a high degree of internal social and political cohesion and subjective self-awareness, and who have achieved political significance as a group within the Indian Union.[3] The Punjabi-speaking Sikhs seemingly possess the classic ingredients of nationality formation: a geographical region, an arena of history and language linked to culture, and a religious ideology. Moreover, Punjab has been the granary of the India and is the richest state in India, with an average income of £220 per year. Punjab has its border with Pakistan and the Kashmir region, therefore it is a region of strategic

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[2]*The Tribune*, 15 November 1995.
[3]Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, 1974, p.277.

HINDU K
KARAKORAM RANGE
R. INDUS
Iskardu
HIMALAYAS
Kabul
Jalalabad
R. KABUL
Shabkadar
Naushera
Jamrud
Khyber Pass
Peshawar
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HAZARA
Haripur
Hasan Abdul
Taxila
Rawalpindi
Baramulla
KASHMIR
Srinagar
Pir Panjal Range
Poonch
Shupaiyan
Pir Panjal Pass
Ghazni
Kohat
Kalabagh
Pindi Gheb
Mirpur
Rajauri
R. CHENAB
Kishtawar
Akhnur
Bhimbar
Rohtas
Jhelum
Salt Range
Bannu
AFGHANISTAN
Rasul
Gujarat
Jammu
Sialkot
Mianwali
Bhera
Khushab
Shahpur
Wazirabad
Ram Nagar
Basohli
Chamba
Nurpur
Pathankot
Gujranwala
Kartarpur
Hafizabad
Eminabad
Kalanaur
Gurdaspur
Range
Sahiwal
CHAJ DOAB
SIND SAGAR DOAB
Pindi Bhattian
Sheikhupura
Batala
Qadian
Kangra
R. BEAS
Mandi
Shivalik Hills
Gomal Pass
Dera Ismail Khan
Chiniot
Sharakpur
Shahadara
Amritsar
Beas
JULLUNDUR DOAB
Nankana Sahib
Taran Taran
Kartarpur
Hoshiarpur
Lahore
MANJHA
Jandiala
Kapurthala
Bilaspur
Mankera
Jhang
Goindwal
Sobraon
Jullundur
Anandpur
Simla
Dera Fateh Khan
RECHNA DOAB
Kasur
Sultanpur
Kiratpur
Leiah
R. JHELUM
R. RAVI
Ferozepur
Mamdot
Phillaur
Ludhiana
Ropar
Kasauli
Sulaiman
Dera Din Panah
Kamalia
Harappa
DOAB
Dipalpur
Faridkot
Jagraon
Whadni
MALWA
Mani Majra
Nahan
Sirmoor
Pak Pattan
Kot Kapura
Sirhind
Maler Kotla
Sadhaura
Multan
BARI
Barnala
Nabha
Patiala
Ambala
Dehra Dun
Sangrur
Mustafabad
Bhatinda
Samana
Shahabad
Jagadhari
Dera Ghazi Khan
Muzaffargarh
Shujabad
R. SUTLEJ
Kurukshetra
Thanesar
Khangarh
Kaithal
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R. GHAGGAR
Karnal
Saharanpur
Bolan Pass
Sirsa
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BALUCHISTAN
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Mithankot
Hissar
Hansi
Sonepat
R. JUMNA
Meerut
Rojhan
Rohtak
HARIANA
SINDH
Delhi
Gurgaon
RAJPUTANA
100 Miles
**(Founded by Nanak)
*(Founded by Arjun)
Shikarpur

THE PUNJAB

importance. Therefore, events which take place within its borders constitute another perspective on the future of the Indian polity and society. Most importantly, a land of remarkable cultural diversity, Punjab as is well known, is virtually a test-tube example of change and transformation. Examples of new forms of collective consciousness, social movements and intellectual ferment abound and enable the social scientist to explore these societal tensions.

Located on the north-eastern margins of India, the region of Punjab, has been the gateway into the Indo-Gangetic plains for invaders over the last three millennia. The northern boundary of Punjab was marked by the vast Himalayan mountains, while the river Indus in the west demarcated the western border of the province, and the river Yamuna marked the eastern boundary separating Punjab from the Gangetic plains. Extending from the foothills of the Himalayas, the Punjab is an extensive plain sloping gently down from the snow-clad mountains in the north and the west towards the scorching deserts in the south.

The name Punjab, meaning 'the land of five rivers', is based on the five feeder rivers - Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej - which once flowed through Punjab. At present, the topography of Punjab is etched by only three of the major five rivers, which have created three intra-fluvial tracts. These internal physiographic zones have influenced many of the internal cultural and regional cleavages among the Sikhs. The region enclosed between the river Ravi and the Chenab is the Majha region. The Majha is often considered the 'cradle of Sikhism', because of the presence of major Sikh shrines and pilgrimage centres associated with the Sikh gurus. Vigorous campaigns associated with the Sikhs have often proliferated in this territory. Between the rivers Beas and Sutlej lies the narrow fertile tract of Doaba, also known as the

garden of Punjab. The territory enclosed between the rivers Ravi and the Chenab is the Malwa region. This territory never became part of Lahore state under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Under British suzerainty, several Sikh chiefs of Malwa had to cede their dominions to the imperial rulers. Here it is useful to note that in its initial phase, the Sikh unrest was confined to the Majha area. However, as the Sikh movement gained momentum, the Majha and the Malwa regions became the main areas of resistance. Some attribute this to the proximity of these areas to the border with Pakistan, which allows an easy escape route; while others have emphasized the history and tradition associated with each socio-geographic region.

This fertile region, roughly appearing like a triangle, had formed part of the ancient Indus Valley civilization in the third millennium before Christ, when Dravidian city-states had dotted the Indus Valley. Scholars are divided on whether the Aryan invaders swept the region in the second millennium before Christ and whether they established small republics all over Punjab. It was in Punjab that Vedic Hinduism flourished and many classic Sanskrit works written. Not only did the Vedic Aryans evolve a new system of religious belief and practice, but they also established the social system based on caste. The dark skinned Dravidians were relegated to the unprivileged status of *dasas*, 'or slaves'. The Sikhs of Punjab are believed to have descended from the Aryan settlers. Indologists widely agree that Indian civilization was among the oldest in the world and its cradle was in Punjab. During the fourth century before Christ Greek armies under Alexander swept across Punjab and imprinted an unmatched artistic pattern on the land. Soon after Alexander's departure, the Punjab was brought under the rule of the powerful Mauryan empire. During this period, Buddhism came to dominate the religious

life of the people of Punjab. In the second century before Christ, the Greek king Menander established his power in Punjab; Greek coins bear testimony to the Hellenic influence in Punjab.

The advent of a series of invasions by Arab, Afghan, Turkish and Persian conquerors from the seventh century was to leave an Islamic imprint on the land and its people. In the mid eighteenth century the Afghan invader successfully detached the province of Punjab from the rest of India. This conquest was followed by the establishment of the vast Sikh empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh during the eighteenth century. Sikh political power collapsed on 29 March 1849, with the British conquest of Punjab following two Anglo-Sikh wars. The independence of India in 1947 and the sanguinary partition of British Punjab between India and Pakistan on the basis of Hindu and Muslim majority areas, resulted in the massive reorganization of the territorial boundaries of Punjab. In September 1966, the Punjab province was further trifurcated under the Punjab State Reorganization Bill. The southern, Hindi-speaking, plain districts were formed into a new state of Haryana, the other Hindi-speaking hill districts to the north of Punjab were merged with neighbouring Himachal Pradesh and the remaining Punjabi-speaking areas formed the new state of Punjab. At present, the geographical area of Punjab is 5,033,000 hectares and the population is 20,190,795, of which 70.28 per cent is rural and 29.72 is urban. Further, 36.93 per cent of the population is Hindu and 60.75 per cent is Sikh according to the figures provided in the Statistical Abstract of Punjab for 1991-92.

Introduction

Aims and Methods

The subject of this thesis is to trace the transition of the Sikhs from a religious congregation in the sixteenth century into an ethnic community in the eighteenth century and from an ethnic community into a nation in the late twentieth century. The aim of the thesis is to analyze some of the historic conditions and processes which give rise to ethno-nationalist movements in late industrializing societies such as India. The method employed here is largely historical. I have sought to present a general historical account of evolution of the Sikh community in the earlier period (1469-1947) using secondary sources and for the later period (1947-1995) a mixture of primary and secondary sources. Among the primary sources particularly consulted are important resolutions and minutes of meetings of the major political party in Punjab, the Akali Dal. In addition, speeches and letters written by Akali Dal leaders are examined. I have found particularly useful newspaper reports and editorials on significant events in Punjab since the 1970s. This data is augmented by empirical research involving in-depth interviews with representatives of three sections of the Punjabi population, namely the politicians, newspaper editors and the Sikh activists involved in the movement for secession. These interviews were conducted during fieldwork in Punjab between October 1992 to April 1993. I am indebted to Mr. S.S.Bal for providing me valuable information and data on the Sikh guerrillas. These sources are supplemented by statistical data from government sources concerning the socio-economic development of Punjab. The research also explores statistical data on circulation figures and the readership profiles of major newspapers in Punjab. Among the secondary data I have found particularly useful historical accounts, tracts and books written on the Sikhs during the pre-colonial and colonial period.

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Historical analysis, however, takes us only some of the way towards an understanding of Sikh nation formation. It needs to be supplemented by a sociological analysis of the social base of separatist movements in contemporary India. Here, I focus on two key aspects of the social base: the agricultural revolution and the revolution in communications, both of which occurred from the 1960s onwards. Together these help to explain the timing of the transition to the later phase of Sikh nationalism with its central demand for an independent Sikh state.

This thesis is not about class structure or economic variables except where they impinge on the transition to Sikh nationhood. The hypothesis is that three hitherto unrelated sets of factors account for the three-fold evolution of the Sikh community. The first is economic, notably the green revolution, second is social communications, notably the vernacular press, and third is the religious ideals of the Sikh community, notably the emphasis on the community of warriors and martyrs. My argument is that the conjunction of these sets of factors helps us to understand the nature and timing of the evolution of the Sikh nation formation.

The questions that my research raises include, first, some specific questions relating to the contemporary Sikh unrest. If the demand for a separate Sikh state is a recent phenomenon, then the obvious question is why have the Sikhs articulated this demand only recently? What were the conditions and processes which gave rise to Sikh ethno-nationalism? What is the nature of this ethno-nationalism? Second, at a more general level, the questions that are relevant for our purpose include: How do objectively distinct ethnic groups become subjectively conscious political communities? Why do

people feel loyalty to their nation as well as their family, region, class and religion? What are the historical roots of Sikh ethnic nationalism? What is the social base of ethno-nationalist movements? How does the transformation in communication facilitate ethnic consciousness?

Here I attempt to develop a conceptual framework within which to seek an understanding of Sikh ethno-nationalism and therefore I first consider the classic modernization theories of nationalism (chapter 1). By linking the emergence of nationalism to the industrial transformation in Western Europe, classic theories of nationalism formulate a universal model of nationalism. This model overlooks the specific impact of colonialism and the cultural and historical specificities of non-Western state formation. In the effort to identify the specific historical conditions, the deeper social processes by which nations came to be imagined in the colonial context, the first chapter will explore the distinctive nature, growth and scope of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle in India.

Several questions underpin our endeavour to explain Sikh ethno-nationalism by drawing on the pattern of India's distinctive historical, religious and social experience. In particular, how does religion continue to be the dominant social bond that defines the characteristics of the Indian nation? How do religious identity assertions pose a grave threat to the Indian national state? What factors account for the emergence of religion as a crucial element in the politics of contemporary India? If the much noted religious renaissance in India is not merely a reassertion of religious piety, is it possibly what scholars refer to as a reassertion of nationalism rather than religion? What are the key features of religious nationalist movements? What are the factors which account for the resurgence of religious nationalism at

this moment in India's history? Systems of life and thought have critical implications for modern politics because they regulate social life and predispose a society toward a distinctive pattern of state formation. Chapter two first presents a discussion of the central cultural beliefs of Indian civilization. This is followed by a consideration of the historical context in which religion and modern democratic institutions have colluded in India. Finally, we consider the emerging pattern of religion and politics in India and the resurgence of religious nationalism. Given the vast territorial, cultural and historical complexity of India, it would be misleading to examine the emergence of Hindu religious nationalism as a single phenomenon. The discussion will hinge on those themes which are relevant to understanding the emergence of ethnic nationalism among Sikhs.

The 1980s Sikh movement for sovereignty was not a sudden development. The two subsequent chapters look at the deep social and historical roots linked to the growth of contemporary Sikh self consciousness. In chapter three we look at the early evolution of the Sikhs starting with the inception of the Sikh religious congregation during the period of the Sikh gurus[1] and ending with a clearly defined, fully formed ethnic community during the period of British colonial rule. We devote particular attention to the induction of a distinct set of symbols, a sacred scripture, a sacred city, a community name to the Sikh separatist armoury. The focus is on the institution of the Khalsa, or 'Sikh brotherhood' by the last Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh and the religio-reform movements in the nineteenth century which sought to renew the Sikh ethnic community in the face of Hindu attacks.

[1]Sikh religion has evolved by a succession of ten gurus. The first Sikh guru was Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and the last Sikh guru was Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708).

Introduction

In chapter four we continue the account of the three stage evolution of the Sikhs right unto the present post-revolutionary situation and the growth of a specific Sikh nation aiming to create a Sikh state of Khalistan in Punjab. Here we will pay special attention to the post-independence reorganisation of Punjab and how the changing territorial boundaries of Punjab wove an expression of a homeland into self-definitions of the Sikhs. Besides possessing an already powerful set of religious symbols, a new symbol, that of language, was added to the separatist armoury. Our focus is on the nature of the demand for a Punjabi *Suba* or 'a Punjabi speaking state' and the tactics and strategies employed by the Hindu and Sikh élites. In this context, the role and the attitude of the Central government, the attitude of the minority Hindu community in Punjab and the nature of Sikh politics are examined. We will also consider the processes which gave rise to the Sikh armed resistance for the formation of a separate Sikh state of Khalistan and the impact of charismatic leaders like Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. We also consider the impact of Operation Bluestar[2] in the radicalization of the Sikh diaspora. Finally, we will examine the conditions which led to the disintegration of the Sikh guerrilla movement.

Our study seeks to explain the nature and timing of breakaway movements in the Indian subcontinent. In chapter five, we will attempt to locate the social base of the Sikh movement for secession. Our attempt to discern a pattern of mobilization takes issue with the influential study by Miroslav Hroch based on the East European case. Hroch argues that the nationalist movement begins with an élite of intellectuals and subsequently fans

[2]Operation Bluestar was the code-name for the Indian army assault on the Golden Temple in Amritsar in June 1984.

out to include the professional classes and finally reaches out to other sections of society - the masses of clerks and peasants. In this context, data was collected to establish the socio-economic background of nearly one hundred activists of the Sikh ethno-nationalist movement. Its central task was to bring into focus the nexus between the dislocation and alienation experienced by a section of the Sikh peasantry as a consequence of the transition to commercial agriculture, which made sections of the Sikh peasantry available for mobilisation. We also look into situations which favour a peasant-led ethno-regional struggle as a consequence of the transition to commercial agriculture.

Finally, this study looks at the social and cultural sphere beyond the English-speaking élite in India. The religious polemics expressed in South Asian dialects have been closed to many students of the subcontinent. Consequently, the role of the vernacular press in socio-political movements in India has been virtually overlooked. Chapter six examines the extent to which widely available and influential media such as the vernacular press and cassettes produce inclusive and exclusive forms of nationalist identities that recharge nationalism with varying degrees of symbolic significance. The vast expansion in readership of newspapers and listeners of radio cassettes justifies our selection of this aspect as central to the process of identity formation.

We end with a brief conclusion summarising the argument and underlining some implications, theoretical and empirical of our study.

1

The Trouble With Classic Theories of Nationalism

In this chapter we will attempt to explain the distinctive nature, growth and scope of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle in India. This concern emerges out of our attempt to develop a conceptual framework within which to seek an understanding of Sikh ethno-nationalism. Broadly speaking, we will attempt to identify the deeper social processes by which nations came to be imagined in the colonial context. Our emphasis will be on the specific historical conditions which gave rise to nationalism in India. The chapter comprises three sections. In the first section we will define the key concepts, 'nations' and 'nationalism' adopted in our study. We begin the second section by describing the classic modernization theories of nationalism. This is followed by a discussion on the Eurocentric limitations of the modernization theories of nationalism. In the third section, we will first of all identify the processes which gave rise to the socio-religious reform movements during the nineteenth century under British suzerainty. The socio-religious reform movements preceded the anti-colonial nationalist struggle. We will then look into the social base and nature of Indian nationalism.

I

Concepts and Definitions

Our field of enquiry is bedeviled by attempts to define the terms 'nations' and 'nationalism'. Despite the profound influence of nationalism in the modern world, both the terms have proved notoriously difficult to define. Despite several attempts to define the term 'nationalism' among a variety of scholars, the term remains conceptually evasive. The

protean nature of nationalism is perhaps responsible for this conceptual confusion. The presence of many variants of nationalism makes it difficult to define the term by any one criterion. Although scholars are far from being agreed on the meaning of the terms 'nation' and 'nationalism', we adopt a more inclusive representation of the term 'nationalism'. For our purpose, nationalism represents an ideology and movement on behalf of the nation which incorporates both political and cultural dimensions.

If we view nationalism as an ideological movement, appropriating European classic doctrinal formulations, such as the concepts of popular freedom and sovereignty, then undoubtedly nationalism arose in Europe in the eighteenth century. Further, the rise of nationalism in the West was a predominantly mass-democratic political occurrence. As the scientific state emerged as an engine for social progress, European society broke out of the conceptual mould of a religio-ethnic community so as to develop parliamentary democracy. Nevertheless, this view of nationalism is derived from a historical transformation which was unique to Europe and is not rooted in the social and political realities of non-European societies. This exclusive concern with European modernity underpins the major historical and sociological approaches to nationalism and from this springs the conceptual muddle which mires nationalism.

What is Unique About Modern Nationality?

For some scholars, the doctrine of nationalism is based on the twin ideals of autonomy and self-government. The desire to liberate territories subjugated by alien conquest is not new, but the impulse to transform society into a people's state and to

redraw the political boundaries in conformity with ethnographic demands is unique to the modern world. The nationalist movement in India expressed the vital aspiration to liberate the people from the constraints of British imperial rule. Nationalism is a revolutionary force which aims at transferring sovereignty from an external ruler, or a monarch, to the collectivity of people. This is made possible through the institution of the modern national state, the highest political form in which the citizens are the ultimate locus of sovereignty. The sovereign state makes possible the political and cultural integration of the masses through organised activity, such as the promotion of popular education, universal suffrage, and so on. But, whether the rationalism and the scientific temper embodied in the modern state have the potential to destroy the hold of faith on public life depends on the specific historical circumstances under which nationalism emerges. In the Indian subcontinent, religion remained the dominant social bond that defined the characteristics of the nation, despite the development of modern parliamentary democracy. It is for this reason that the Hindi term '*hindutva*' signified the equation between Hindu cultural identity and the Indian nation, while the Urdu tern '*quam*' designated the ideal of a religio-political community of Muslims and the Punjabi term '*panth*' was emblematic of a moral and political collectivity of believers in the Sikh faith.

Despite its wide intellectual currency, the term 'nation' is not easy to define. Once again, there are important differences in ways of defining the term 'nation'. Some emphasize objective elements, while others give significance to subjective factors. It is possible to incorporate both these approaches and avoid single factor characterization of nations. For our purpose, we adopt the following working definition of the nation: A

nation is an imagined political community seeking a historic homeland of their own, whose solidarity is sustained by the presence of cultural channels of communication, notably ethnicity and language and whose boundaries are in continual flux. In the modern world, any body of people who consider themselves a nation can claim the right to self-determination, or the right to a separate sovereign independent state for their territory. The nation is a modern construct which became salient in the Indian subcontinent in the second part of the nineteenth century. Let us see if we can adopt this definition to describe the Sikh nation.

Many scholars argue that the Sikhs constituted a nation even in pre-modern times. Noted historian, Joseph D. Cunningham, has laid emphasis on the consolidation of power by the Sikh kingdoms and has argued that the Sikhs developed from 'a sect into a people' under Guru Gobind and from a people to a 'nation' under Ranjit Singh.[1] The theme of the development of Sikh self-consciousness is emphasised in another classic account by the Sikh historian, Khushwant Singh. He views the struggle of Sikh forces against the British in the second Anglo-Sikh War in 1848, as 'a national war of independence'.[2] However, our study proposes that at present, the objective criteria that define membership in the Sikh nation are those of the *kes-dhari*[3] Sikhs who speak Punjabi and write it in the Gurmukhi script and those *kes-dhari* Sikhs who identify with the distinctive historical

[1]Joseph D.Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs from the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*, Delhi, 1966,p.92.
[2]Khushwant Singh, *The Fall of the Kingdom of the Panjab*, Bombay,1962,p.147.
[3]The *kes-dhari* Sikhs are those who maintain *kes*, or 'the unshorn hair of the Khalsa', but have not received baptism. The majority of Sikhs in Punjab are *kes-dhari* Sikhs. Those Sikhs who have taken *amrit*, or 'received the baptism of the Khalsa', are called *amrit-dhari* Sikhs. Only a small proportion of the Sikh population is *amrit-dhari*.

consciousness and behaviour of the Sikh people.[4] The Sikh nation is *imagined* because the members do not know most of their fellow members, yet in their minds they constitute a homogeneous community. The Sikh nation is imagined as a *community*, because it disregards the inequality and heterogeneity that actually exists among the Sikhs. It was the development of social mobilization and political organization during the past century that played a decisive role in the development of modern Sikh nation, as defined above. The passage of the Gurudwara Reform Act of 1925 provided the Sikhs a solid institutional framework in the form of the SGPC and its political arm, the Akali Dal.[5] Both these institutions have successfully articulated Sikh political aspirations since India's independence. Paul Brass has argued that 'The Akali Dal has not been simply a political expression of pre-existing Sikh aspirations, but it has played a critical role in creating a modern Sikh nation.'[6]

Two other terms need preliminary definition. First, the term 'secessionism' refers to 'a demand for formal withdrawal from a central political authority by a member unit or

[4]In chapters four and five, we discuss the historic and social developments which gave rise to this distinct Sikh self identification. Our study challenges Richard Fox's (1985) view that the British view of the Sikhs as a 'martial race' *created* a distinct Sikh identity. Also, the view espoused by Harjot Oberoi (1994)that the Sikh commercial class of town dwellers was an indispensible element in the growth of Sikh communal consciousness and that it was, in fact, the vigorous Sikh bourgeoisie who *created* a new episteme, a standard discourse of modern Sikhism.

[5]The Akali Dal and the SGPC, or the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabahandak Committee are the foremost Sikh institutions. The SGPC is the guardian of all Sikh religious institutions and the Akali Dal is a major political party in Punjab. We will examine the formation of these historic institutions of the Sikhs in chapter three.

[6]Paul Brass, *Language, Religion*, p.433.

units on the basis of a claim to independent sovereign status.'[7] The persisting secessionist movements in India are the Sikh demand for sovereignty and the Muslim claims for autonomy in Kashmir. Secessionism is different from separatism which does not aim at such withdrawal. Second, an 'ethno-regional movement' is distinguished from other regional movements by the emphasis on ethnic distinctiveness, on ethnic markers such as language or religion, in a bid to seek a separate region within an existing state, as well as seek an independent sovereign state. So, the term 'ethnic nationalism' refers to minority or majority nationalism which emphasises ethnic distinctiveness.

II

The Origins of Nationalism in Europe?

Modernization Theories of Nationalism

In order to appreciate the nature of nationalism among the Sikhs, we must begin by differentiating it from its counterparts in Europe. To understand these European counterparts we turn to two influential accounts of nationalism both inside and outside Europe, which stress the role of modernization. The leading exponents of modernization theories of nationalism are Elie Kedourie, whose classic works include *Nationalism* (1960) and *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (1970) and Benedict Anderson, whose work *Imagined Communities* (1991) is perhaps the most cited and original text in the field.[8] These influential theorists explain the genesis of nationalism through the industrial

[7]Michael Hechter, 'The Dynamics of Secession', *Acta Socilogica*, 1992, 35, p.267.
[8]Although Ernest Gellner's theory of nationalism (1964)is widely influential in explaining the origins of nationalism in Europe,it is tangential to the argument of the thesis.

transformation of European society and its spread throughout the rest of the world through colonialism. Although their approach differs over the emphasis on different processes of modernity, both their theories have stimulated lively debates on the question of the European origins of nationalism and its global osmosis.

Let us first consider one of the most original theories of nationalism put forth by the distinguished political philosopher, Elie Kedourie. Elie Kedourie's book is an interesting starting point because it raises several critical issues which infuse mainstream writing on the national question and will require more detailed explanation later. Kedourie's approach is that of a historian of nationalist ideas and accords pivotal role to the disaffected intellectuals who invented the doctrine of nationalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Europe. This period of European history, argues Kedourie, was characterized by profound social and political upheaval. The revolutionary philosophies of the Enlightenment and classical humanism challenged the existing belief systems and social practices, which had been venerated for centuries. This revolt in European systems of life and thought was accompanied by a breakdown in the transmission of religious beliefs and political experience from one generation to the next. This created powerful social strains and eighteenth century Europe seemed devoid of spiritual comfort. As Kedourie notes,

> Put at its simplest, the need is to belong together in a coherent and stable community. Such a need is normally satisfied by the family, the neighbourhood, the religious community. In the last century and a half such institutions all over the world have had to bear the brunt of violent social and intellectual change, and it is no accident that nationalism was at its most intense where and when such institutions had little resilience and were ill-prepared to withstand the powerful attacks to which they became exposed.[9]

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[9] Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Hutchinson, 1960, p.101.

The nationalist principle was an attempt by European intellectuals to restore the sinews of 'lost community' in the modern world. Thus, nationalism was a conspicuous outgrowth of the personal discontent of European intellectuals who sought millennial solutions to this violent change.

But why did European domination evoke nationalism in Asia and Africa? Kedourie's classic work, *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (1970) is centered around this pertinent question. In cognizance with his general theory, Kedourie explains the diffusion of the doctrine of nationalism through the Western educated élite in Asia and Africa. In other words, the osmosis of European manners and ideas through the indigenous professional classes was decisive in the proliferation of nationalism in Asia and Africa. The indigenous élite imbibed current European political thought and were deeply stirred by the dominant strands in the modes of modern European thought. Moreover, the prestige of European prosperity, its military might and the success of its administrative methods generated a desire to emulate and adapt the European belief system. By contrast, 'the traditional societies showed up so lamentably in comparison'.[10] This generated discontent with the existing traditional societies and an impulse to adopt European doctrines. Moreover, the planetary spread of European power from the sixteenth century onwards was accompanied by the growth of conceptions of biological contamination. The racial discrimination that these marginal men were subjected to, coupled with the oppressive

[10]Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, New York and Cleveland, 1970, p.27.

sense of inferiority, erupted in the twentieth century anti-colonial movements that sought to oust imperial rulers and establish new states in the ex-colonial territories. Kedourie emphasises that nationalism was an ideal wholly conceived and elaborated in Europe and a completely alien concept in Asia and Africa. He notes,

> Almost any Asian or African nationalism, considered as a scheme of thought or a program of action, suffers from artificiality, from seeming a laborious attempt to introduce outlandish standards and out-of-place categories, and nowhere do they seem more out-of-place than in trying to adopt the European category of the nation-state.[11]

In a 'traditional' hierarchical society, an individual occupies a well-defined space in a meaningful and coherent cosmic order. This fulfills the basic need of an individual and is a source of immense security. But the process of 'Europeanization of government and economy', the transformation from a self-sufficient subsistence economy into the increasing involvement with the world economy, pulverized the social fabric of these societies. [12] The psychological strain experienced by the masses as the processes of modernity impinged upon them, was successfully articulated by the indigenous élite through the 'European' doctrine of nationalism. Thus, the disaffected Western educated élite constituted the vanguard of anti-colonial nationalism in Asia and Africa.

Finally, Kedourie has emphasised key aspects which endow the nationalist principle with an European outlook. The key feature of the nationalist doctrine is the historicist conception of the nation. According to Kedourie, the doctrine of nationalism rests on the European intellectual tradition of secular millennialism. In order to define a

[11]Ibid.,p.30.
[12]Ibid.,p.27.

nation, it is necessary to evoke the nation's past. This attempt to resurrect a past is linked to the tendency to enforce uniformity of belief, particularly religious homogeneity, among members of a body politic. The nationalist doctrine is based on those premises which were unique to European politics in medieval and modern times. Thus, according to Kedourie, nationalism as a doctrine holds that the only legitimate political association is one which binds together men speaking the same language, sharing the same culture, and cherishing the same heroes and ancestors. Therefore, nationalism expresses a preoccupation with history which has come to be a dominant theme of the modern European outlook and which has also been taken up wherever European culture has penetrated.[13]

Benedict Anderson's widely acclaimed book, *Imagined Communities* (1991), is a powerful attempt to formulate a theory of nationalism from a Marxist historian's perspective, which at the same time probes the dismal record of Marxist scholarship in failing to come to terms with the national question. Anderson regards nationalism as a 'cultural artifact' and examines the discrete historical forces that gave birth to an originary nationalism in America towards the end of the eighteenth century. He then goes on to explain the global spread and adoption of the idea of the nation first by popular movements in Europe and later by the anti-imperialist movements in Asia and Africa.

The depth of Anderson's work lies in his presentation of the conditions and processes which gave rise to nationalism in Western Europe. The nation, he argues, is a modern construct. It became possible to 'think' the nation only after the erosion of three fundamental cultural conceptions, first in Western mind and later elsewhere. These

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[13] Ibid., p.35.

systems of life and thought were, first, the concept of a cosmically central classical community, linked by a distinct sacred script. Second was the idea of sacral monarchy, which gave legitimacy to the dynastic states which formed the world political system. Third was the belief that cosmology and history were identical; the origins of the world were indistinguishable from the origins of humankind. These world views imparted meaning to the uncertainties and the fatalities of human existence. However, the development of a capitalist economy, social and scientific discoveries and the rapid expansion of communication brought about a profound transformation in modes of apprehending the world. The gradual demotion of these interlinked certainties was in Anderson's words,

> No surprise then that the search was on, so to speak, for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together. Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.[14]

Anderson further goes on to establish the link between the origins of national consciousness and the introduction of print-capitalism.[15] But how did the fixing of print languages give birth to a new national consciousness? First of all print-languages enabled communication across diverse local and social groups. The printed word made it possible for a vast horde of unrelated and anonymous fellow readers to imagine themselves as a self-conscious community. This profound historic development was accompanied by the

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[14]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, reprinted 1991, p.36.
[15]Here, print-capitalism is emblematic of a process when a book becomes a commodity. It is circulated and exchanged like any other commodity in a market.

creation of vernacular languages for administrative purposes. However, only print-languages could possibly be elevated to this new politico-cultural eminence. In this way, print-capitalism facilitated the development of national state languages. Anderson argues that it was neither the requirements of a capitalist economy, nor the impact of Enlightenment that provided the framework for the rise of new national consciousness. But it was, in fact, the printmen who made it possible to conceive of a nationally-imagined community.

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the conceptual model of a sovereign national state was available for pirating. The composite of American and French elements provided the blueprint of an independent national state. This model was adapted by the anti-imperialist movements in Asia and Africa in the twentieth century. Global imperialism necessitated the rapid expansion of the bureaucratic apparatus. This impelled a need for an educated indigenous population to fill the subordinate positions in the administrative hierarchy. The colonial school system churned out a literate native population. However, the emerging bilingual intelligentsias were to confront the racist character of nineteenth century imperialism, pushed through the colonial school system, as well as the state machinery. These disaffected, literate men promoted anti-colonial nationalism as a response to the shared experience of racism and became central to the rise of anti-colonial nationalism. Finally, since these marginalised men had access to the models of the nation-state, the western civic concept of the nation was applied to set up new states in the ex-colonial territories.

Critique of Modernization Theories

These modernization theories have not gone unchallenged. Anthony D. Smith's well-known book, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986) challenges the modernist view that nations and nationalism are purely modern phenomena. Against this Smith maintains the modernization theories are based on an ahistorical and essentializing conception of society as either 'traditional' or 'modern'. By focusing on the historical and social origins of nations, Anthony D. Smith reveals the striking resemblance to the 'modern' idea of a nation of the ethnie or ethnic community, notably, a desire to liberate territories conquered by alien invasions, even in pre-modern eras. Hence the persistence of myths and memories, symbols and values, rituals and recitations, language and scripts, which define and differentiate human population everywhere in the world and at all times. Smith argues that ethnicity provides one of the most pivotal and durable model for human association and this ethnic model has been adopted in the formation of modern nations. In other words, . historically, the formation of modern nations was made possible because of the presence of a relatively homogeneous ethnic core. Thus, Smith expounds an entirely convincing case that the nature of modern nations is best understood by examining their antecedent cultural attributes of memory, myth and symbol, embodied in customs and traditions. Later we shall see how these ideas apply in the Punjab case.

The master narrative of European modernity posits a similar dichotomy between 'modern', European and 'traditional', non-European societies. It has become standard practice in scholarly narratives to portray the 'traditional', non-European societies as

economically and political backward and dominated by religious assumptions and traditions. By contrast, 'modern', European societies are characterised by the proliferation of industrial capitalism and the concomitant erosion of a religious world view. Likewise, Hans Kohn, the pioneering historian of nationalist ideologies, had put forth an influential distinction between the rational, civic nationalism of the 'West' and the authoritarian, organic, mystical nationalism of the 'East'.[16]He argued that the type of nationalism that emerges in a society depended on the stage of social and political development. Outside the Western world, in Central and Eastern Europe and in Asia, nationalism not only arose later, but was a defensive, imitative response by the educated élite. The disaffected intelligentsia from backward societies promoted nationalism to compensate for their feelings of inferiority, when threatened by the superior industrially advanced Western culture. Thus, nationalism in Asia and Africa is believed to be a regressive phenomenon; a nostalgic retreat into history to claim descent from a once grand civilization.

To digress for a moment, a classic example of this binary opposition is the portrayal of the system of a 'traditional moral economy', as opposed to the 'modern rational capitalist economy'. A few empirical details concerning the idea of Asiatic stagnation and the notion of an autarkic village community in 'traditional' India, marked by hierarchical, ritual and non-ritual forms of exchange, will help shed light on the import of this dichotomy. There is widespread agreement among a variety of scholars that traditional cultural conceptions determined India's jajmani system and religious traditions

[16]Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, New York, 1945, pp.18-20, pp.329-331.

encompassed the politico-economic domain.[17] Nevertheless, there is abundant empirical evidence of the existence of powerful centralising institutions as well as the expansion of economic networks in pre-colonial India. The significance of private landed property in pre-colonial India was a body of fact which the colonial regime deliberately suppressed, so that non-private land could be aggregated by the Crown to produce revenue.[18] Similarly, there is considerable awkward evidence of market towns, or '*qasbas*', flourishing cities, trading centers and regional markets, the development of banking and the use of money, all interlinked through the network of commerce and migration. These are just a few features that suggest that the notion of the custom bound, autarkic village community in pre-colonial India is merely a product of a romantic imagination. In the light of the discussion presented above, there is some ground to suggest that pre-colonial India had its own pattern of change. Therefore, the notion of a pristine 'traditional' Indian society, untouched by any processes of change until the pervasive incursion of capitalism under

[17]According to the anthropologist, Louis Dumont,India's jajmani system is a hierarchical and cosmic system of relations of production and exchange, whereby the lower castes provide ritual and non-ritual services to the high-caste *jajmans* in exchange for specified products of the land.This highly controversial concept is regarded by many scholars as a European myth to describe a non-European society. See Simon Commander, 'The Jajmani System in North India: An Examination of Its Logic and Status across Two Centuries', *Modern Asian Studies* 17, 1983,pp.283-311 and Christopher J.Fuller, 'Misconceiving the Grain Heap: A Critique of the Concept of the Indian Jajmani System', in *Money and Morality of Exchange*, Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch (ed.),Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 33-63.

[18]See for example, Irfan, Habib, 'Structure of Agrarian Society in Mughal India', in B.N.Ganguli (ed.), *Readings in Indian Economic History*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964.The weight of the present evidence seems to me to indicate that European thinkers either had no access to critical knowlege about the non-European world or this knowledge was suppressed for political reasons. Even so, there is a tendency to endlessly parrot the Eurocentric assumptions that informed modern discourse of the West.

the British colonial rule, is a misconception.[19] Just because the transition from feudalism to capitalism completed itself in Europe, must we therefore adopt a standpoint that rejects outright any historical facts and causally efficacious processes outside the non-European world? This digression is sufficient, I hope, to highlight some of the misconceptions germane to our theme of explaining nationalism outside Europe, to which we shall now return.

The master narrative on nationalism posits the anti-colonial struggles for political sovereignty as a simple product of the diffusion of 'civilized' European ideas as part of the process of modernity, to the backward colonial world. Kedourie's study of nationalism is replete with this broadly diffusionist outlook, which in one breath castigates nationalism - 'the drug may also excite its addicts to a frenzy of destruction' and proclaims with a hint of irony that nationalism is 'Europe's latest gift to the world'.[20] This perspective is self-contradictory. On the one hand, nationalism is regarded as a destructive phenomenon, on the other hand, the transmission and spread of nationalism outside Europe is considered progressive. Similarly, the position of the marginal intellectual depicted in Asia and Africa

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[19]Another classic example that illustrates how explanations of non-European societes often reflect the scholars favoured theoretical position, rather then a fair representation which takes into account the historical specificities, is the concept of Asiatic mode of production (AMP). The explanation of world history outside Europe from the perspective of Marxist historical materialism, hinges on the concept of Asiatic mode of production (AMP). Brendan O'Leary's original work forcefully illustrates that the key components of either the AMP or oriental despotism were insufficiently present in either Hindu or late Islamic empires in India. He concludes that the AMP concept is in fact a fatal weakness of Marxist historical materialism and without this concept Marxist historical materialism is incapable of explaining history outside Europe. See Brendan O'Leary, *The Asiatic mode of production: oriental despotism, historical materialism and Indian history*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989.

[20]Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, p.147.

is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, these élites are purported to be the carriers of 'modern' European ideas, on the other hand, they are believed to fashion 'traditional' ideologies of religious activism.

There are a number of pitfalls in this approach, which call for a critical revaluation of the existing corpus of writing on the national question. First of all, the availability of the conceptual model of a sovereign national state alone, does not motivate anyone to adopt a foreign model, however successful. The processes by which it became possible to adopt and adapt the model of the national state are generally not seriously addressed. For instance, why did the 'marginal man' in Asia and Africa, choose this particular European idea and not any other ideas? Is he completely alienated from his society? How does he spread the new ideas he has imbibed to the rest of the society? Second is the failure to consider the specific impact of colonialism. This factor by itself may be judged a decisive contribution toward the eventual establishment of a sovereign state in the ex-colonial territories. This objection is based on the ubiquitous presupposition that 'modern' Europe is the result of a historical transition, whereas the social and political transformation in the countries of Asia and Africa is simply a byproduct of revolutionary convulsions centered around Europe. Modernization theories of nationalism are a very good example of the geographical diffusionism which lies at the root of modern European thought. By presenting a Eurocentric, universalistic model of modernization, European history is held to provide the blueprint for the category of world history. On the one hand, the significant differences between 'western' and 'eastern' nationalisms are widely acknowledged. On the other hand, most of the historical and sociological approaches to nationalism hold that

since nationalism as an ideological movement first arose in the West, we must therefore judge and explain non-Western nationalism by reference to this Western criterion. Third, the historical agency of the people involved in the anti-colonial nationalist struggles is denied. After all, the anti-colonial struggle to seize state power was also a product of economic exploitation and oppression. Thus, current writing on the national question grossly oversimplifies the nature of anti-colonial struggles.

This study is an attempt to break out of the existing conceptual mould by identifying the specific historical conditions and processes which gave rise to nationalism in India. Undoubtedly, the rise of Western domination ensured the importation of European ideas and concepts. Nevertheless, the emerging ideological formations were a glorious synthesis of the European and the indigenous elements as we shall reveal later on. Colonialism and the expansion of the world system impinged on the existing structures and processes, but they did not determine them. Therefore, it is of critical importance to view the anti-colonial national liberation struggle against an historical backdrop of the antecedent state and ideological systems.

Let us now compare and contrast the features that Indian nationalism shared with the West, as well as those which differentiated Indian nationalism from the bourgeois nationalism of Western Europe. Describing the conditions which gave rise to nationalism in Western Europe, Benedict Anderson observes, '...in Western Europe the eighteenth century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious mode of thought'.[21] In other words, economic change and the development of rapid

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[21]Ibid., p.11.

communications disintegrated the existing cultural systems in Western Europe, thereby, impelling a need to bind the population together in new ways. Likewise, Elie Kedourie attributes the birth of nationalism to the profound social and political upheaval that shook Western Europe in the eighteenth century. He argues that nationalism was an explosive psychological reaction to the revolt in European systems of life and thought.

By contrast, the appearance of nationalism in India was not marked by the ebbing of religious belief, rather nationalism in India fermented in an age of intense religious awakening. More importantly, enhanced communication facilitated the reformulation and rapid transmission of religious discourses. This observation poses a challenge to the ubiquitous traditional-modern dichotomy which posits that the introduction of modern communications marked a transition from religious culture to secular culture; this transformation contributed directly to the rise of national consciousness. This idea is based on an uncritical generalisation from the Western European case. Socio-religious reform movements were forerunners of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle. This indicates that nationalism in India arose under very different historic circumstances. Since modernization theorists impute the arrival of national consciousness to the gradual demotion of the religious world view, do we take this to mean that the historic need to conceive of a national community should not have arisen in India? But the need did arise and so did nationalism arrive in India. Partha Chatterjee has rightly observed that Indian nationalist discourse is derived from the European type but it is different because of the colonial

context within which it arose.[22] As a political movement, nationalism arose in India towards the end of the nineteenth century. It grew in protest against and in conflict with the existing state pattern. I bring up these simple minded observations primarily because nationalism in India did not find its justification in a rational societal conception, as may have been the dominant trend in Western Europe. To sum up, at least provisionally and very tentatively, I would like to suggest that every nationalism is, in some way, an indigenous development. Nationalism in India is radically different from its European counterparts because of the religious framework through which it operates.

Let us now consider the specific historic circumstances under which nationalism arose in India. In doing so, we will attempt to identify some of the deeper social processes by which nations came to be imagined in the colonial context.

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[22]Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*?, London, 1986.

III
The Genesis of Nationalism in India

Pax Britannica 1857 - 1947: The proliferation of Socio-religious Reform Movements[23]

The mainstream writing on the genesis of nationalism in Asia and Africa has always maintained a stony silence on the pivotal role of Christian missionaries. To write on this theme in this chapter is to question that silence and engage with conceptual debates on the nature of nationalism in India. At the heart of the first ideological battle in colonial India was the Christian church. The vast majority of the British Protestant missionaries were Evangelicals. In order to effectively propagate evangelical Christianity, the Christian missionaries introduced new institutional forms during the late eighteenth century. The founding of printing presses by the Christian missionaries was a pre-condition of the philological - lexicographic revolution during the nineteenth century British colonial rule. The print media were established in order to generate a steady stream of tracts, pamphlets and religious texts. Since public discourses on the life of Christ were accompanied by the free distribution and circulation of evangelical literature, the bulk of the printed communication was in regional languages. The outstanding communication skills of

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[23]The term 'socio-religious reform movements' refers to an attempt to mobilise mass support in a bid to recast the society through modifications in social practices and customs. An ecclesiastical authority is invoked to legitimise these changes. The basis of this ecclesiastical authority is usually the sacred scripture, which is no longer considered to be properly observed and therefore, requires reinterpretation. These movements pit the reformers against the self-consciously more orthodox groups. The movement develops and maintains an organizational structure over time. The foremost reform movements among the major religious communities in colonial India during the nineteenth century were: the Arya Samaj movement among the Hindus, the Ahmadiyah movement among the Muslims and the Singh Sabha movement among the Sikhs. We have examined the Arya Samaj movement and the Singh Sabha movement in greater detail in chapter 3.

missionaries played a creative role in the development of the indigenous press and publishing. Further, the printing process standardized scripts, lexicons and grammatical rules and fostered the standardization of vernacular languages in India.

Another powerful channel for catechizing was the establishment of a network of church sponsored schools. Bible classes were included in the school curriculum. For decades mission schools were the only schools to provide anglo-vernacular education. The term 'anglo-vernacular' education is emblematic of a syncretic education process, combining knowledge of vernacular languages, together with English education. Although school textbooks were considered as surrogates for the Bible and the threat of conversions loomed large, the appeal of the mission schools for the native population was an English language education. The rapid expansion of imperial bureaucracy in the nineteenth century had fuelled the need for English educated Indians to fill the subordinate echelons of administration. Moreover, the colonial administrators relentlessly pursued a policy which undermined the indigenous educational system and projected the superior educational standards of the mission and state-run schools. By the 1880s, India was rife with mission establishments.[24]

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[24]C. A. Bayly has emphasised that the introduction of new communication techniques and the rapid diffusion of knowledge during the colonial era, owed its success to the flourishing pattern of social and political critique entrenched in pre-colonial Indian society. He notes, 'For while the Baptists, the CMS and the crypto-Christian administrators unwittingly helped to engender an Indian critical public, its rapid development owed much to patterns in debate, publicity and the diffusion of knowledge which were already in place in India. I call this area of debate and social and political critique the Indian *ecumene*. This was the community of learned administrators, jurists, Mogul public officials and community leaders who represented the views of the populance to the rulers during the late Mugal period and the rule of the successor states of the eighteenth century. The Indian state had been sensitive to the political and social discourses of its more honorable citizens. Bodies

The well-organized Church was a powerful institution of European power. The nineteenth century British colonial state was informed and moulded by British Protestant and Irish Catholic doctrines. In the eyes of the imperial administration, both British rule and evangelism stood for Christian civilization. This view is aptly demonstrated by a leading administrator in Punjab, Donald McLeod, who declared, 'If the Bible be the word of God and the books revered by the Hindus and the Mohammedan contain mere fables, then it must be intended that the Christian rule prepare the way for the spread of the gospel'.[25] The imperial alliance between the civil administrators and the missionaries was formidable to the native population. The overall impact of this process is summed succinctly by C.A.Bayly; he observes, 'the impact of the intense missionary propaganda, the dominance by European and Indian Christians of the new print media, and the simultaneous appearance of government school masters in town and country, were

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of intelligentsia and literate administrators kept up a constant dialogue through the Persian news report, the private letter, the couplet of a satirical poem and the Persian or Hindustani written tract. The place for debate was the steps of the mosque, the space outside the city temple, the *kazi's* house or the shrine of the local saint. Debate was regulated and formalized. Literary issues preoccupied the Indo-Muslim *ecumeme* or proto-public, as they did Habermas's eighteenth century European public. In the poetic *mushaira* the emperor's or nawab's presence was honored, but his poem might be subject to scathing criticism. Information circulated rapidly, and well beyond the ruling elite. Theological disputations and covert political debates sometimes involved large parts of the urban population in Hogarthian scuffles. Placarding against unjust officials was as common as the *pasquinade* of Baroque Rome...The way in which the north Indian critical ecumene helped determine the nature of the nationalist public of the late nineteenth century needs to be considered in detail.'C.A Bayly, 'Returning the British to South Asian History: The Limits of Colonial Hegemony', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, New Series, Vol.XVII,no.2,December 1994,p.9.

[25]*Report of the Punjab Missionary Conference held at Lahore in December and January 1862-63*, Edward Lake (ed.), Ludhiana, 1862, p.351. Quoted in Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.219.

profoundly unsettling for the established Indian order'.[26]Moreover, the susceptibility of the upper crust of the society to the proselytising activities of the Evangelicals enraged the local community.

The cultural forces unleashed by the British Raj, sparked a series of religious reform movements among all the major religious communities in colonial India. These reform movements set the stage for the political battle with the imperial state which arose in 1885 with the formation of the Indian National Congress. Socio-religious reform made certain components of religious discursive tradition available for the development of a nationalist ideology. The historic role of these socio-religious reform movements in British India must be understood within the context three interacting civilizations. To the indigenous Hindu-Buddhist civilization was introduced the Perso-Arabic civilization of the Muslim conquerors who had gained political control of nearly two-thirds of the subcontinent in the fourteenth century. The decay of the Moghul system gave the British the chance to establish a territorial foothold and interject the British version of Western civilization during the eighteenth century. Thus, three layers of civilization interacted and moulded the nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements.

Let us try to perceive this transformation in its major contours. Conventional approaches to the study of religious reform movements in colonial India seek to explain how the rising middle class, empowered by its position in modern capitalism, attempted to gain hegemony by enunciating a standard cultural idiom through the religious reform

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[26]C.A.Bayly, 'Returning the British to South Asian History: The Limits of Colonial Hegemony', *South Asia: Journal of South Asia Studies*, New Series, vol. XVII, no. 2, December 1994, p.7.

movements. Following the penetration of the capitalist world economy under the aegis of the British Raj and the expansion of imperial bureaucracy, an influential class of bilingual, professional men emerged. These bodies of men were primarily based in urban areas where they acquired new skills in the mechanics of print culture. In order to come to terms with the profound social transformation under colonial rule, these men set up socio-religious associations, voluntary bodies, established schools, published tracts and vernacular newspapers to uphold the interests of their respective religious communities. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson develops a persuasive thesis on the relationship between the creation of print-languages and national consciousness. He notes, 'the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation'.[27]It is to this connection between print-languages and national consciousness that we shall now turn our attention.

Whereas in Western Europe, print technology was received within the wider context of the impact of Reformation, the emergence of Protestantism and its attendant rationality, in India, by contrast, the impetus to print-capitalism was provided by a significantly different set of historical conditions. The evangelical wave permeating in the early nineteenth century, encouraged a derogatory view of Hinduism and Islam. Unitarian Christianity soaked with rational ethics attributed the present decadence of the native society to the existing belief system and social practices. Imbibing the spirit of the time, the exponents of the socio-religious reform movements set about reevaluating their

[27]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.46.

cultural traditions . The reformatory zeal impelled the reformers to call for the creation of a more just society, free of polytheism, idolatry and caste prejudices, promote the concept of monotheism, attempt to redefine the status to women by granting them the right to education, promote widow remarriage and condemn practices like female infanticide. This pitted the reformers against orthodox members of their own religious community as well as against their opponents, who derided their theological precepts. This process of recasting and revitalising group identities, energised and hardened pre-existing religious affiliations. Thus we see that far from eroding the sacred community through the dethronement of sacred languages, as Anderson has argued, print capitalism in fact reinforced the significance of language as the basis of religious identity.

Further, the historic process of the creation of print languages and the development of vernacular languages-of-state reinforced the fusion of linguistic and religious identification. The overall impact of this historic process was the creation of areas of greater ideological uniformity within the broad boundaries of religion and the ascendancy of religion-based linguistic identity over all other competing identifications such as class, gender and profession. This was evident as Urdu came to be identified with Islam, while Hindi became a marker of Hindu identity and Gurmukhi script and Punjabi language were turned exclusively into emblems of Sikh identity. Scriptures have served as the concrete and objective markers of religious identity even in pre-modern times. But a particular script embodying the religious identity of a people was a new development. The perfect isomorphism between religion and language that we find in contemporary South Asia has its historical antecedents in this social upheaval that shook the Indian

subcontinent in the nineteenth century. Remarkably, neither is the Qur'an written in Urdu language, nor are the Hindu scriptures written in Hindi, while the compositions in the Sikh holy scripture, Adi Granth, are a melange of various dialects, often coalesced under the generic title of Sant Bhasha. This perhaps gives credence to Hobsbawm's (1983) well-known thesis that some traditions are 'invented' and formally instituted by political élites.[28] They represent a response to novel situations and an attempt to establish continuity with a historic past, although the continuity with the past is largely factitious. In the context of invention of tradition, language as a key symbol to promote social cohesion among a religious community seem to have been a major innovation by the élite of the Indian subcontinent. Nevertheless, this was not an entirely factitious invention. After all, the scriptural book was written in the script which came to embody the religious identity of a people. Hindu claims over Hindi rested on the fact that Hindi was a modern variant of Sanskrit, while Urdu was an Indo-Persian linguistic synthesis and written in the Arabic script. Likewise, Adi Granth was written in the Gurmukhi script.

An examination of the processes of construction and transformation of religious identities in colonial India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been the subject of considerable scholarly inquiry. The view that early Indic culture was inherently pluralistic and marked by the absence of a concern for demarcating religious boundaries is well established among Indian scholars. [29]Only later, with the introduction of a new

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[28]Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Traditions*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

[29]For an excellent illustration of this approach, see, Ashis Nandy, 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance', in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities and Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990,pp. 69-93.

statistical ethnology and methods of survey and mapping by the British was a standard, highly uniform religious tradition established in India. Partha Chatterjee takes the same argument a step farther to argue that caste in India is a fabrication of the British Census and Population Survey. What is lost sight of in this kind of reading is the striking presence of indigenous forms of anthropological knowledge which provided the framework for the colonial knowledge of the district gazetteers. As C. A.Bayly correctly notes, 'the 'Institutes of Akbar', a flexible mix of maxims for kingship, Islamic ethnology and revenue and military details, spawned a range of more local imitations in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.'[30] Extensive comment is quite unnecessary. It should suffice to note that modern institutions such as the Census and Population Survey enhanced the pre-existing religious categories and were crucial in defining caste and religious communities.[31] Further, there is a tendency to blame the 'divide and rule' policy of the British for nurturing and inciting religious conflict, in order to neutralize the emerging Indian nationalism.[32] Once again, contempt for the British element oversimplifies and falsifies the nature of the interaction between religious communities in pre-colonial India.

So far our attention has focused on the process of recasting social identities in colonial India. We noticed that the creation of print languages, the development of vernacular languages of state and the introduction of a new statistical ethnology enhanced pre-existing religious affiliations. Further, in response to the aggressive proselytism of the

[30] C.A Bayly, 'Returning the British to South Asian History: The Limits of Colonial Hegemony', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, New Series, Vol.XVII,no.2,December 1994,p.20.

[31] This issue has been further discussed in chapter 4.

[32] For an illustration of this approach, see Gyannendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial India*, Delhi, 1990.

Christian missionaries, backed by the British colonial state, the ideologues of the socio-religious reform movements sought to revitalise their cultural traditions. They drew on religious authority in order to legitimise change. These new processes and ideological formations were interesting forerunners of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle and provided the framework for the development of a nationalist ideology. More importantly, these new developments seem to have been confined to the new, urban professional élite. But the intelligentsia were just minuscule literate reefs amidst enormous illiterate oceans. The vast mass of the population in British India was not literate and resided in rural areas. Moreover, the growing audience of literates does not imply that everyone was reading books or newspapers. How then might we explain the extraordinary success of the socio-religious reform movements? In order to appreciate the response of the masses to the socio-religious reform movements it is crucial to examine the relationship between the ideologues of nationalism and their society.

The Anti-Colonial Nationalist Movement for the Struggle for India's Independence

The striking character of the Indian nationalist movement was to bring the masses into the struggle to expel the British. Broadly speaking, two key factors allowed this development. First, *pax Britannica* prevented the fateful coalition between India's landed élite, the main beneficiaries of the British Raj after 1857, and the rising commercial and manufacturing classes, who felt cramped by British policies which sought to exploit a protected Indian market. Second was the alliance, which seems rather paradoxical because of the conflicting interests, between the powerful commercial classes and a weak peasantry, the tillers of the soil. However, it was the rise of Mahatma Gandhi as a dominant figure in the

nationalist movement, which enabled the successful alignment between the native bourgeoisie and the peasantry. It was under Gandhi's leadership that the Congress party emerged as a powerful mass organization. The main thrust of Gandhi's program was village uplift. Central to this program was the conception of *Swadeshi*, or 'local autonomy'. Gandhi defined the term *Swadeshi* as follows:

> *Swadeshi* is that spirit in us which restricts us to use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is the use of my immediate religious surrounding. If I find it defective, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is the use of my immediate religious surrounding. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the domain of politics I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbors and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting ...[33]

In this way, the Mahatma looked back at an idealized peasant life in order to salvage the true, pure religion of his people. Only the revival of traditional village India, purged of all meaningless accretions such as superstition and repressive features, such as untouchability, could provide a model of the good society. Nevertheless, quite a few critical scholars view Gandhi's notion of *Swadeshi* as a backward looking idealization of peasant life. As Barrington Moore, points out, 'Never did it occur to Gandhi that to maintain village India would be to condemn the mass of India's population to a life of squalor, ignorance, and disease.'[34]

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[33]M.K.Gandhi, *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, fourth ed.,Madras, 1933, pp.336-337,341-342.

[34]Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Penguin books, first published in 1966, reprinted 1981, p.376.

While there is no doubt that Gandhi was the spokesman of the Indian peasantry and the village artisan, his outlook was rooted in the Indian experience. It is well known that the import of British textiles which began in 1814 and continued through the nineteenth century, almost destroyed the indigenous handicrafts. The weavers belonging to the artisan castes, who produced goods of high quality for the market, were effectively damaged by the import of British products. Further, during the late eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth century, the British imposed a new system of tax farming and land tenure. Historically, the first main form of settlement was the Permanent Settlement (also known as the *zamindari system*). The British took over this arrangement from the Moghuls, who had ruled and taxed through native authorities, especially the *zamindar*, who had been the intermediary between the ruler and the peasant. Under the *zamindari system*, the British took nine-tenths of the revenue that the *zamindar*, or 'the native tax-collecting official', collected from the peasant tenants. The other system for collecting revenue was the *ryotwari system*. This system was imposed in southern India, in view of the absence of the *zamindars*. Since revenues were collected directly from the cultivators, the term *ryot*, or 'cultivator' is used to describe this system of tax farming. Although these observations are set out in broad strokes, what is important for our inquiry is that large sections of the peasantry and the artisans bore the brunt of the intrusions of capitalism under the British administration.

To return to the question, the doctrine of *Swadeshi* affirmed native mercantile interests. Gandhi endorsed the slogan of 'buy Indian' and launched a peaceful mass noncooperation movement to boycott British products. Further, Gandhi opposed political

strikes as they contradicted his doctrine of nonviolence. As he remarked in 1921, 'It does not require much effort of the intellect to perceive that it is a most dangerous thing to make use of labor until laborers understand the political condition of the country and are prepared to work for the common good'.[35] He hoped that as labor became better educated the principle of arbitration would replace strikes.[36]

Outside the arena of institutional modes, the reformers successfully intervened in the domain of everyday life. They objected that the British Raj was not only undermining their existence in the economic domain, but in the cultural domain, their worldview was under siege. The peasantry fiercely resisted any efforts to surrender its cultural autonomy, particularly to those social groups who extracted revenues and services from it, since religion is part a system of cultural conceptions through which human beings interpret and conceptualize the social world around them. Also, the evocation of myths and mass ritual events are deeply ingrained in the practice of everyday life and are part of a more all-embracing cosmology. The common modes of apprehending the world bound together the entire society. The dynamic of Indian nationalism was to enable men and women to bury their insecurity in the face of natural forces by feeling themselves to partake in a historic collectivity. Sacred shrines, the symbolic embodiments that bind the community of believers through a shared cosmological understanding, became the foci of political campaigns to oust the British occupation. Not only did saints and holy men, whose priestly privilege had been threatened by the whole edifice of Western scientific culture introduced

[35]M.K.Gandhi, *Speeches and Writings*,p.1049-1050.
[36]M.K.Gandhi, *Speeches and Writings*, p.1048.

by the British, play a significant role in the anti-colonial nationalist movement, but modern politicians, like Mahatma Gandhi, had an outlook more becoming of the traditional holy Hindu man. Thus we see that Indian nationalism, far from being an alien concept, wholly conceived in Europe, as Kedourie and others have led us to believe, was firmly rooted in the political and social realities of India. This is precisely what makes Indian nationalism so different from its European variant. Although nationalism falls within the realm of statist politics, it is imbued with cultural elements which explain the logic of nationalism. That is why it is critical to examine the way in which the modern discourse on individualism, equality and secularism articulated by classical liberals in the West was engaged by the Indian élite.

Let us return for the moment to the collision between rationalism and the ecclesiastical authority. Anthony D. Smith in his influential book, *The Ethnic Revival* (1981) has accorded a pivotal role to the problem of legitimacy arising out of the institution of the 'scientific state'. He argues that the displacement of the religiously sanctioned dynastic state by the 'scientific' state leads to a moral crisis. Smith has coined the term 'dual legitimation' for this crisis. By 'dual legitimation' is meant the fundamental choice that societies have to make 'between a social structure dominated by religious authority or by 'rational-legal' authority of the scientific state'.[37] The spectacular success of a man-made 'scientific state' with its centralised administration challenged the efficacy of divine authority. There was a growing belief that injustice and suffering were not

[37]Anthony D.Smith, *The Ethnic Revival*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 90, 93-8, 99-104.

transcendental, cosmic problems, rather they were man-made problems. These essentially social and practical problems could be resolved through collective planning and action by means of the engine of the 'scientific' state. The response of the élites to this challenge to revealed dogmas by the powerful secular state varies, giving rise to different kinds of nationalism.

Smith would designate to the category of 'reformists' the major revivalist figure of late nineteenth century Hindu nationalism, Swami Vivekananda, who sought to reconcile the religious tradition with his commitment to social welfare through the engine of the state. He envisioned a classic Aryan civilization which had played a seminal role in world progress. Swami Vivekananda pledged to restore this Hindu nation to the forefront of world progress. He rejected the passive isolationism prescribed by Brahmin priests through caste laws prohibiting contact with aliens. Rather he presented the vision of a dynamic, mobile Hindu nation whose past glories sprang from an interchange with other cultures. He argued that social decay and inner degeneration sprang from the religious quietism of the traditionalists. The nationalist movement in India was an integrative movement, counterposed to the materialist atomist West as well as the ossified social and cultural native traditions. These socio-religious movements were forms of protest and dissent. The key factor initially spurring the drive for socio-religious reform was the overall process of coming to terms with the profound changes generated by British colonial rule. A striking characteristic of the new élite, the exponents of social and cultural reform, was their propensity to identify with a religious community and to draw on religious authority for the legitimization of change.

Thus, the advancing armies of capitalism - commercialization and rapid communication - did not completely sweep away the established cultural episteme. In 1906, under the radical influence of B.G.Tilak, the Congress Party adopted the goal of self-government, or independence from the British Raj, *Swaraj*. This word is derived from classical Hindu philosophy and depicts the state of self-rule or a balanced state of self-control, the highest spiritual state through which a human being establishes perfect harmony with the rest of the world and escapes from cycle of perpetual reincarnation. Moreover, Indian nationalism is suffused with images that glorify the Hindu Indian past. The period of Gupta empire (320-540 A.D.) is epitomised as the golden age, before the Muslim invasions. In this way, the Indian nationalists struck a responsive chord in Hindu culture and successfully galvanized the country into opposition against the British. The dominant version of Indian nationalism, articulated by leaders of the Indian National Congress, imagined an Indian nation cast in the idiom of the majority Hindu religious tradition. Thus, Hindu religion formed the basis of Indian national identity. However, this was to have fateful political consequences. First, the discourse of Indian nationalism subsumed minority religious traditions - Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs - under the rubric of majority Hindu nationalism. Consequently, momentous political issues concerning the rights of minorities were thereby obscured. Second, the Hindu coloration imparted to Indian nationalism alienated the Muslim population. This found expression in the elegant articulation by M..A. Jinnah that Muslims and Hindus were separate nations. This became the ideological basis for the creation of Pakistan as a homeland for Indian Muslims and led to the division of the imperial state of British India. So, since the beginning of modern

politics in India, in the nineteenth century, the narrative of the nation has been derived from religious identification.

The nature of nationalism in the post-colonial states has been examined by Clifford Geertz, from an anthropological perspective. In his edited collection of essays, *Old Societies and New States* (1963), Geertz indicates that there are two competing yet complementary components in the nationalism of post-colonial states. The ethnic component is portrayed as a commitment to 'primordial ties' of religion, language, race and territory which endow a distinctive identity to individuals, while the civic component as a desire to build a dynamic modern state. Since state and ethnic boundaries rarely coincide, the result is endemic conflict. In the new states peoples' sense of self remains rooted in cultural givens of blood, race, religion or language. But there is also a growing realization of the advantages of building a sovereign state as a powerful instrument of collective progress. Since allegiance to a civil state requires subordination of the natural 'primordial' ties in favor of an overarching, unfamiliar civil state, this threatens the loss of identity 'either through absorption into a culturally undifferentiated mass or, what is even worse, through domination by some other rival ethnic, racial, or linguistic community that is able to imbue that order with the temper of its own personality.'[38] Political progress in the new states is centred around keeping these two interdependent, competing loyalties aligned.

The weight of the present evidence seems to indicate that the nationalist movement did not assume a revolutionary form, nor did it cause political or economic upheavals in

[38]Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States*, New York, 1963, p.109.

India. Nevertheless, the outcome of these forces was the institution of the modern national state in India. In his pioneering essay on the advent of political democracy in India, Barrington Moore's (1966) laments frustratingly, that there has not been in India up to the present time 'a revolutionary break with the past'.[39] More importantly, he reasons that the British presence imposed a reactionary element, a negative critical reaction. 'In the Indian situation, around the middle of the nineteenth century , dissident aristocrats and peasants could work together only through a passionate hatred of modernization.'[40] Thus, despite the development of formal structures of democracy since 1947, an independent judiciary and free general elections, there has been no substantial modernization of India's social structure. In fact, democracy provides a rationale for refusing to overhaul on any massive scale a social structure that maintains the privileges of the Indian élite.

To sum up, the process of developing an industrial society in India, did not coincide with the emergence of a class of people with the capacity and ruthlessness to force through these radical changes. The Hindu nationalists undertook the task of directing the path toward socio-political modernization through the recovery of national pride. Earlier we noted that the reformers searched in the past to salvage the pure, genuine religion and revitalise its dignity in a rationalist world. The leading ideologues of nationalism in Asia and Africa reasoned that the material advancement of the West had effaced the spiritual life of those societies. They reasoned that industrialism only brought material anomic cosmopolitanism and their endeavour was to retain faith in nature, family

[39]Ibid., p.431.
[40]Ibid., p.353.

and religion in their society. They believed that it was possible to develop a modern national state and yet retain a vigorous private and public religious life. Clearly, nationalism in India did not emerge in the wake of religious decline, rather the nationalist movement was characterised by religious reform. Western liberals have condemned the outlook of Indian nationalists to look back at an idealized past, to glorify the Indian village community, in order to provide the model of a good society. They argue that Gandhi, like many Western liberals, was too distressed by the horrors of modern industrial life. As Barrington Moore bitingly states, 'To me this sympathy merely seems to be evidence for the *malaise* in modern liberalism and its incapacity to solve the problems that confront Western society.'[41]

Conclusion

An attempt to explain the origins of nationalism in India, can serve as a check upon those theories which explain all nationalisms with reference to the bourgeois revolution that culminated in the Western form of democracy. India has not witnessed a bourgeois revolution, nor has there been an industrial or a peasant revolution in India. Remarkably though there has been the establishment of a formal structure of democracy in India. Therefore, the historical preconditions that ushered nationalism in India differ sharply from those of Western Europe and the United States. If nationalism is an alien doctrine outside Europe, if empires and tribes are more 'natural' in the Asian and African context and if

[41]Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p.378.

neither imperialism nor poverty can adequately explain the spread of nationalism, what can?

At the structural level, bureaucratic expansion in India permitted preferment to much greater numbers and gave rise to a commercial bourgeoisie belonging to far more varied social origins. Nevertheless, British occupation permitted collaboration between the commercial classes and the peasantry, who felt cramped by British policies. The vast masses of the Indian peasantry provided the backbone to the anti-colonial nationalist struggle in India. An important contributing cause of peasant insurrection was the deterioration in the peasants' situation under British Raj.

At the ideological level, there has never been a historic shift, a revolutionary break with the past in India. Western cultural devaluation, the challenge of exogenous modernization and political subjection impelled a yearning for a return to an idealised ethno-religious past. Hindu revivalists operated within the parameters of their ethnic and religious traditions, and the Hindu nationalists imagined the classic Northern Aryan and Hindu version of Indian nationalism. The genius of the Indian nationalists lay in incorporating the vast multitude of unlettered peasantry, the motley complex of cultural traditions, the linguistic plethora into the imagined universe of the Indian nation. Nevertheless, this historicist conception of a Hindu nation denied the sectarian and caste differences among Hindus. It further excluded other minority religious and regional traditions. Even anti-Brahmanical religions such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were claimed to be part of the Hindu - *rashtra*, or 'nation', on the grounds that they originated in India, whereas Islam and Christianity which come from outside were excluded. In the simplest terms, religion

remained the dominant social bond that defined the characteristics of the nation. Nationalism in India did not find its justification in a rational societal conception, as was the case in Western Europe. Rather, the notion of *Swaraj*, or political self-government, provided the legitimacy for the institution of modern national state in India. By that time, the model of the sovereign national state had become an international norm.

Broadly speaking, the introduction of modern organizational structures and techniques, such as printing, the founding of a broad network of voluntary associations and the spread of modern-style education, created a new public arena in Indian social life. The new institutional framework became an important resource to sustain organized activity and promoted a new national consciousness. The Hindu reformers adopted modern organizational techniques which helped in creating a public arena for a Hindu nation. Further, the apotheosis of language, a socially standardized system of symbols, for administrative convenience or as a means of unifying state-wide communications, generated religion based linguistic nationalism. Print capitalism facilitated the historic formation of languages of everyday life based on the sacred languages of scriptures. Thus, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi became languages of sacred communication of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism; this heightened communal consciousness. Finally, these religio-linguistic nationalisms laid the bases for national consciousness, which gave rise to the anti-imperialist national resistance. To sum up, transformation in communication made possible a new phase in the development of nations. These developments in India, provide a striking contrast to the universalist claim that the introduction of modern communications

signify the erosion of a religious world view and the societal transformation into secular culture.

2
The Contradictory Unity of the Indian State

India's complex and variegated social structure comprises of large and distinctive religious, linguistic, regional, tribal and caste groups. It is natural for these diverse ethnic groups to assert their cultural identity. The three principal bases of identity assertions perceived as threats to the Indian nation are language, region and religion. While the identities anchored to the first two are accepted as legitimate, as evidenced by the creation of administrative units based on them, religious identity assertions, particularly in conjunction with a geographical region, are regarded as posing a grave threat to India's political integrity. The Sikh demand for a separate state and the Muslim claims for autonomy in Kashmir are examples of two breakaway movements in India which have religious and territorial bases. However, current events in India reveal that the gravest threat to India's integrity is, in fact, posed by the extremist activities of the majority Hindu population.

As a prelude to our consideration of the emergence of the Sikh ethno-nationalist movement in the Indian Punjab, this chapter will examine the emergence of the radical Hindu political parties in national politics of India. We shall pay close attention to the manner in which Hindu parties employ religious symbolism in order to gain political power. We shall also consider the historical and sociological contexts of politics in India. The political implications of Hinduism and the pattern of its interaction with politics will also be considered. Given the vast territorial, cultural and historical complexity of India, it

would be misleading to examine the emergence of Hindu nationalism as a single phenomenon.

Our aim is not to explain the phenomenon of religious nationalism in its full social and historical complexity. The discussion will hinge on those themes which are relevant to understanding the emergence of religious nationalism among the Sikhs of the Indian Punjab. In this manner, it is hoped to link the emergence of Sikh ethno-nationalism to the more general processes at work in Indian society. This chapter seeks to address the central question: why do religious identity assertions pose a grave threat to the Indian nation state?

Religion remains deeply entrenched in the personal and social lives of all Indians. There is no indication of decline of religion in everyday life. The performance and participation in rituals, religious festivals, religious observance, in fact, reflects a fresh religious fervour and vibrancy. Never before in Indian history have religious pilgrimages attracted such huge congregations as modern means of communication and transportation become widely available, new buildings of religious worship are sprouting everywhere and religious books continue to outsell all others in India. The national television broadcast of seventy eight serialised episodes of the Hindu epic, *Ramayana*, between January 1987 and July 1988, marked a historical event in the history of Indian television. The series attracted the largest ever, record viewership of an estimated 80 to 100 million people.[1]If the much noted religious renaissance in India is not merely a reassertion of religious piety, is it possibly what scholars refer to as reassertion of

[1]P. Lutgendorf, 'Ramayan: The Video', *The Drama Review* 4, no.2, 1990, p.136.

nationalism rather then religion? What factors account for the emergence of religion as a crucial element in politics of contemporary India? In what way is the nature of communities related to religion? What are the key features of religious nationalist movements?

The chapter is broadly organized into five sections. The introductory section identifies the religious minorities in India, this is followed by the second section which examines the central cultural beliefs of Indian civilization. The third section provides an account of the distinctive nature and development of Indian nationalism, followed by an examination of the interplay between religion and modern democratic institutions in India. The fourth section considers the emerging patterns of religion and politics in India and the resurgence of religious nationalism. The last section looks into the question of what explains the resurgence of this form of religious nationalism at this historical moment.

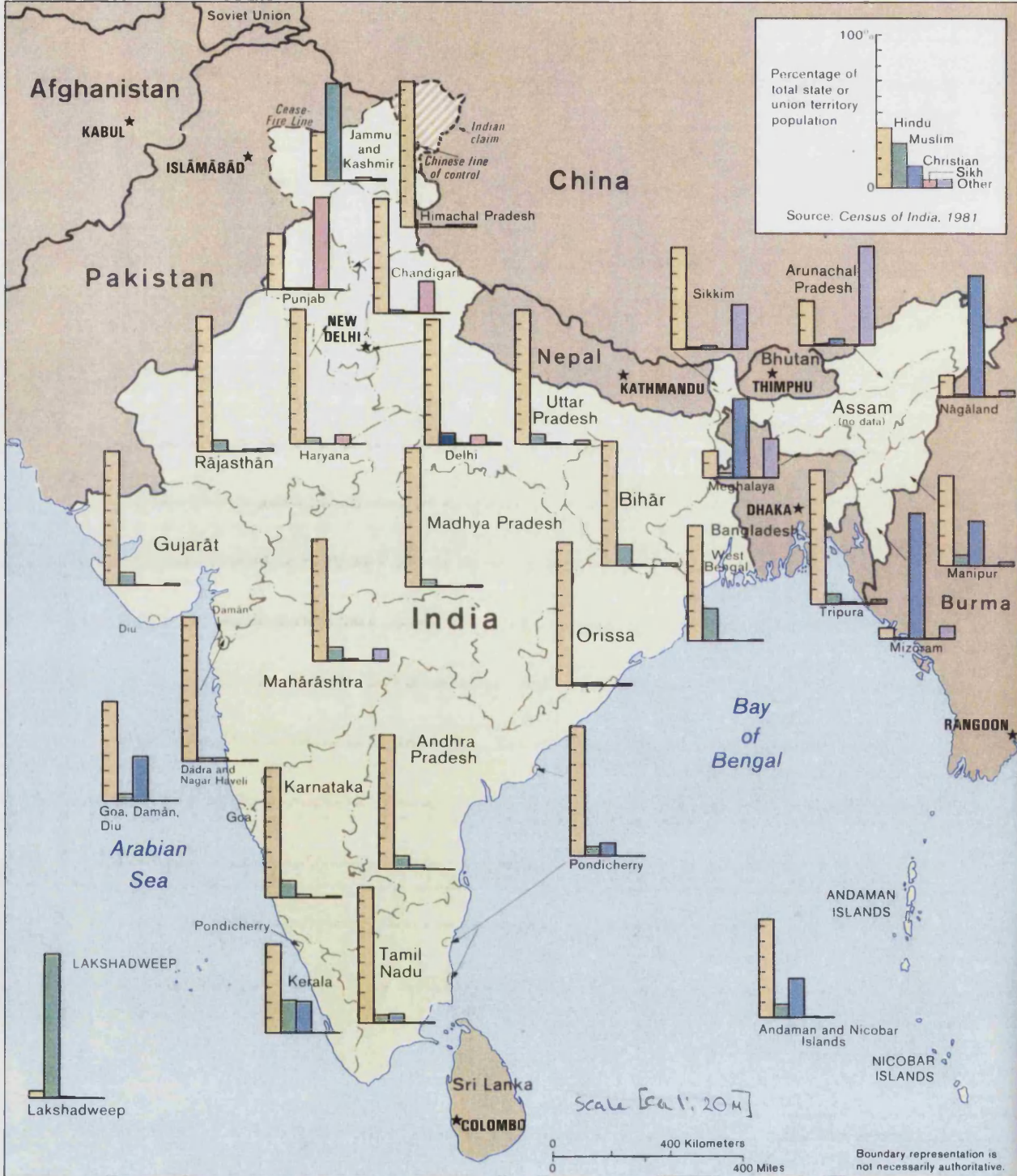
I

Who are the Religious Minorities in India?

According to the 1981 census, Hindus comprised 82.60 per cent (549.8 million), Muslims 11.4 per cent (75.5 million), Christians 2.4 per cent (16.2 million), Sikhs 2 per cent (13.1 million), Buddhists and Jains 1.2 per cent (7.9 million) of the total population in India. However, none of the religious groups in India is cohesive. They are deeply divided along caste, regional, linguistic, urban-rural and socio-economic categories.

India is the third largest Muslim country in the world. The Muslims in India have historically been a minority, even during the peak of the Moghul rule. The Muslims in India are geographically dispersed and form a majority only in the state of Jammu and

Map 2

India's Religions
Soviet Union
Afghanistan
KABUL
ISLĀMĀBĀD
Pakistan
China
Nepal
KATHMANDU
Bhutan
THIMPHU
Bangladesh
DHAKA
Burma
RANGOON
Sri Lanka
COLOMBO
India
Arabian Sea
Bay of Bengal
Percentage of total state or union territory population
Hindu
Muslim
Christian
Sikh
Other
Source: Census of India, 1981
Jammu and Kashmir
Cease-Fire Line
Indian claim
Chinese line of control
Himachal Pradesh
Punjab
Chandigarh
NEW DELHI
Haryana
Delhi
Rājasthān
Uttar Pradesh
Sikkim
Arunachal Pradesh
Assam (no data)
Nāgāland
Meghalaya
Manipur
Tripura
Mizoram
West Bengal
Bihār
Madhya Pradesh
Gujarāt
Daman
Diu
Mahārāshtra
Orissa
Dadra and Nagar Haveli
Goa, Damān, Diu
Goa
Andhra Pradesh
Karnataka
Pondicherry
Kerala
Tamil Nadu
LAKSHADWEEP
Lakshadweep
ANDAMAN ISLANDS
Andaman and Nicobar Islands
NICOBAR ISLANDS
0 400 Kilometers
0 400 Miles
Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.
706406 12-85

Kashmir, where they form 64.2 per cent and the Hindus 32.3 per cent of the total population. The picturesque Kashmir valley has been the centre of a violent irredentism movement since the early 1980s. The remaining bulk of the Muslim population is concentrated in selected urban centres in North India. The striking feature of the minority Muslim population in India is that they are mainly converts from the disadvantaged low Hindu castes. The Muslim masses are not legatees of centuries of political dominance exercised by a small Islamic elite, whose culture was largely Persian. As Hindu-Muslim rivalries across the borders of India and Pakistan remain unabated, Hindu radicals persistently impugn the loyalty of India's Muslim minorities.

India's 13.1 million Sikhs form a majority of 60.8 per cent in the state of Punjab. The Sikhs attained a majority as a result of massive reorganization of the territorial boundaries of Punjab first in 1947 and again in 1966. The pre-partition Punjab was 51 per cent Muslim, 35 per cent Hindu and 12 per cent Sikh. The partition of the subcontinent into two sovereign states, India and Pakistan, led to the largest transfer of population known in history. It resulted in the massacre of nearly a million people, and over 13 million crossed the borders of the newly formed states. The partition of 1947, witnessed the migration of Muslims out of the Indian side and the movement of Hindus and Sikhs out of the Pakistani side. In 1951, refugees from Pakistan comprised fifth of the total population of Indian Punjab. The post-partition Punjab was 64 per cent Hindu, 33 per cent

Sikh and 2 per cent Muslim (1961 Census). The 1971 census figures represented 60 per cent Sikhs, 38 per cent Hindu and only one per cent Muslim.[1]

The Sikhs form a distinctive diaspora within India as well as abroad. In 1971, when the Sikhs constituted 1.9 per cent of the total population of India, more than 20 per cent of the Sikhs were living outside Punjab.[2] By 1981, 2.8 million Sikhs, more than one-fifth of the population, lived in other parts of India.[3] The Sikh diaspora is scattered world wide. At present, a third of the total Sikh population lives outside Punjab, and over a million live outside India. The overseas migration was largely impelled by British recruitment which initially made migration to the British empire accessible. The relation between transnational migration and nationalism and the question on why transnational migration reinforces religious and nationalist identities will be discussed in chapter five.

Christians form a majority in India's north-eastern states of Nagaland, Meghalya and Mizoram. These three states are small and India's Christians are less cohesive and are not so politically vocal. Indian Christians are mainly converts from low Hindu castes or tribes. They usually speak the language of the region in which they are situated. The tribal population in India is geographically concentrated, overwhelmingly rural, disadvantaged and impoverished. The scheduled castes or the untouchables form between 15 to 25 per cent of the Indian population. The scheduled castes in India form a minority by virtue of

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[1]M. Weiner, 'India's Minorities: Who Are They? What Do They Want?', in *India 2000: The next fifteen years*, edited by James R. Roach, Maryland, 1986, p.107.

[2]J.S Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.210.

[3]M. Weiner, 'India's Minorities: Who Are They? What Do They Want?', in *India 2000*, edited by James R.Roach,1986, p.108.

their low social status, their economic situation and the discrimination to which they are subjected by the dominant castes. None of India's several thousand castes is in the majority in any region. Therefore, they do not identify themselves with any homeland.

Table 1

States where national religious minorities are a majority: Classification of population by religion and as percentage of total population of the state

	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs
Jammu and Kashmir	32.3	64.2	0.1	2.2
Punjab	36.9	1.0	1.1	60.7
Nagaland	14.3	1.5	80.2	0.1
Meghalya	18.0	3.1	52.6	0.1
Mizoram	7.1	0.4	83.9	-
India	82.60	11.4	2.4	2

Source: Census of India, 1981

II

Causal Factors in the Relation Between Religion and Politics in India

Religion and Culture in India

The framework for explaining the current phase of communal politics in India since the late 1970s developed here draws on the pattern of India's distinctive historical and social experience. The abstraction of religious experience from all other forms of experience, although recent, is distinctive to the history of the West. This profound transformation in the belief system is usually linked to industrialisation, modern science and the growth of the nation-state; as also to the distinct nature of the Christian belief system, and the distinct social origins and spread of Christianity. This constitutes a central theme of the Western intellectual tradition.

Systems of life and thought rooted in religious traditions predispose a society toward a certain pattern of relationship between religion and politics. These metaphysical positions have

critical implications for modern politics because they regulate social life and patterns of behaviour. The following discussion examines the distinctive characteristics of the traditional belief system in India. Ainslie T. Embree, distinguished historian of South Asia, in his book, *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India* (1990), identifies five fundamental concepts and values that underlie classical Indian religious thought. These principles or cosmological understandings form the basis of the Indian belief system and social practices. These are: 1) the concept of time 2) karma 3) rebirth 4) dharma 5) truth. Further, by tracing their relationship to the social and political sphere some general inferences may be drawn.

Before we begin an appraisal of these cosmological principles, it may be appropriate to emphasise the limited and specific scope of our discussion. These complex cosmological principles are derived from the great ancient Vedic epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana, written in Sanskrit language. The limitations in conveying their meaning in non-Indian languages must not be underestimated. Moreover, there are critical modifications of a cosmological principle articulated in ancient epics and its interpretation and significance in actual social practices. The symbolic meaning as a cultural idiom varies significantly, according to local, regional and cultural practices. These are to be regarded as broad generalisations which allow the possibility of exception to every generalisation. Moreover, the religious world-view displays significant regional and cultural diversity and has been subjected to historical change and alteration. Even so, only a small section of the population may subscribe to this uniform religious experience. Contrary to Embree's claim that these principles are shared by all religious communities in the Indian subcontinent, we will adopt the

view that these world views are shared by those religious traditions whose ancestral roots are in the Indic philosophical tradition, such as the Buddhists, the Jains and the Sikhs and do not incorporate Christians and Muslims, as Embree seems to suggest. Bearing in mind the above qualifications, the following analysis is useful in identifying the core cosmological principles and values that provide meaning to human existence in India.

1) The Concept of Time

Indian civilization is characterised by the theory of cycles or recurring periods of creation and destruction. The following are the chief characteristics of the classical Indian cyclical conception of time. First, time moves in concentric cycles. Each world system makes one complete cycle, or a mythic era, or '*yuga*', which is of immense duration spanning three hundred million years. Humanity at present lives in the darkest of all eras, or '*Kaliyuga*'. The present world system was 'created out of the combination of matter and spirit by means of the action of *maya*, the illusory cosmic energy of Brahma the creator. The universal dissolution and destruction comes about when Brahma vanishes into himself'.[4] Second, this process of cyclical regeneration is eternal. This notion of time as infinite/boundless is vitally different from the Hebraic concept of time as a linear progression that has a beginning and an end. It is characterised by incessant repetition of cycles each of vast duration. The third characteristic is the all-embracing/encompassing nature of Indian time. There is a lack of demarcation between humanity and nature and between humanity and the Divine. In other words, Divine history and human history fall along the same continuum.

[4] D.E. Smith, ed., *South Asian Politics and Religion*, Princeton, 1966, p.5.

The conception of time taken by religion has vital implications for the view of history held by its constituents. The Indian conception of time has a tremendous, limitless quality which has enormous implications for understanding the place of humanity in the cosmos. The endless, cyclical movement of time signifies the process of perpetual renewal and decay of the universe. The vastness of the cosmic process makes valuation of the existence of the universe or of human involvement appear trifling. Furthermore, no event is unique, no moment is final.

Those in the conservative tradition interpret this notion of time to explain, what they believe to be the lack of historical awareness among Indians. Ainslie T.Embree points out, 'nor is there likelihood of people taking too seriously their achievements in constructing political institutions. There is not likely to be, in short, the kind of attention to political history that has been common in the Western world and in China'.[5] This view that Indians lack a sense of history is well established among Indological experts. This observation is derived from another aspect of Sanskrit literature, which although it includes historical writing *(itihasa)*, affirms the notion that all forms of knowledge are derived from the Vedas, which transcend time and history. Further, this perspective holds that human history is metaphysically regarded as a lower level of experience in the Indic tradition. This is based on the notion that the essential self of man is never involved in the affairs of this natural world of experience. Donald Smith (1966) once said, 'Hinduism's concern with political institutions and the course of human history is

[5]A.T. Embree, *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India*, California, 1990, p.28.

thus at most a secondary concern. The ultimate philosophical and religious values of Hinduism do not require a Hindu state, or any particular kind of political structure, for that matter'.[6]

Peter van Veer, in his recent book, *Religion and Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (1994), has challenged the view that the propensity to avoid historical referentiality is an indication of the absence of historical awareness. Peter van der Veer contends that this conception of time, infact, relegates history to a lower level of reality, such that history is ultimately not important. He points out, 'Religious discourse tends either to deny historical change or else to prove its ultimate irrelevance...Religious nationalism combines this antihistorical feature of religious discourse with an empiricist search for "facts" that has been highly influenced by orientalism'.[7] He contends that the Hindu nationalist interpretation of Indian history, deeply rooted in religious discourse on change and time, attempts to reconcile the position of Hindu religion on history with the modern need for historical facts. He argues that on the one hand, Hindu nationalist discourse denies evidence of historical change in its paradoxical need to create an imagined, perennial nation, existing beyond time and history. On the other hand, Hindu nationalist narrative is characterised by a modern, empirical search for historical facts and selection of archaeological data which, in turn are heavily influenced by orientalist historiography.

No other historical moment could be more appropriate to falsify the conservative perspective discussed above. The current attempts of Hindu nationalists to reinterpret and

[6]D.E. Smith, ed., *South Asian Politics and Religion*, Princeton, 1966, pp.5-6.

[7]Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, California, 1994, p. xii.

reconcile the Hindu metaphysical position on time in order to reinterpret Indian history and impart real meaning to the world emphasise this point. Moreover, these attempts of the Hindu nationalists intensify religious strife in India. I propose to make two qualifications to van der Veer's persuasive explanation of the Indian view of history. First, other religious traditions in India, such as the Sikhs and the Buddhists share similar metaphysical positions on time to Hinduism. But in practice, the Buddhists and the Sikhs show a remarkable concern for the course of human history. Moreover, in contrast to Hinduism, both these traditions have as their founders historical figures, who are not shadowy mythological figures. The Sikhs regard these recent efforts by the Hindu extremists as an imitation and influence of the Sikh cultural conceptions on the Hindu faith. In the case of India, the historical process of reformulating metaphysical conceptions has strongly been influenced by the historical experience of colonialism and by mainstream Western historiography

The European influence is evident in the use of calendars in India. Calendars perform significant social and ritual functions and define religious identities. The West European calendar is recognised as the official calendar by the government of India. However, religious festivals and auspicious occasions are calculated from indigenous Indian religious calendars, both by the Hindus and the Sikhs. The usage of dual calendars, both Indian and European, varies significantly from urban to rural and the subordinate sections of the population.

The discussion so far, along with the empirical analysis considered, contests Kedourie's claim that, 'history as a distinct mode of thought arose in Europe in the seventeenth century out of the practical preoccupation's of religious and political polemic in which men appealed to

the past in order to attack or defend an institution or a dogma.'[8] Clearly, an attempt to resurrect a past in order to invoke collective identity is not entirely unique to European history, as evidence of religious discourse on history in the Indic tradition illustrates. Even so, the hallmark of the European seventeenth century history was that it drove a wedge between cosmology and history; a fundamental cultural conception that fused the origins of the world with that of mankind. From this sprang the modern requirement for the search for historical facts. Early in this account we noted the success of Hindu nationalists in combining the indigenous religious discourse on change and time with the Western empiricist search for facts.

However, this does not necessarily mean that a religion which regards history as unreal, or if real, ultimately unimportant, will be less concerned with securing or maintaining temporal power, and this undermines Donald Smith's (1966) theory of history that greater concern with the course of history tends to increase a religion's involvement in politics.

2) Karma

Karma is another key concept shared by Indic cultural traditions. Karma is the inexorable law of cause and effect. Karma literally means action; it implies the notion that human actions have inescapable consequences. Every action, be it mental or physical, good or bad bears appropriate result. An individual's destiny in the succeeding life will be the moral consequence of deeds performed in this life. To go on a pilgrimage *(tirtha-yatra*) to important sacred centres, particularly on auspicious occasions, such as bathing festivals (*kumbh melas*) is scripturally recommended karma. A *tirtha* is a crossing place on a river, a metaphor for a place

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[8]Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, New York, 1970,p.35.

to cross over to the other world of ancestors and gods. Sanskrit texts mention seven cities that grant release. These holy cities are: Banaras, Kanti, Hardwar, Ayodhya, Dwarka, Mathura and Ujjain. The practice of pilgrimage is common among Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus in India. The important role of the sacred centres, as symbolic foci of religious identities and in the transmission of religious identities, reflects why control over sacred sites is so crucial in religious nationalism. The attempts made by the state to control Sikh religious centres (*gurudwaras*), especially the Golden Temple at Amritsar, is the subject of chapters three and four.

3) Dharma

Dharma is a complex Sanskrit term, implying diverse meanings. In essence, it refers to cosmological, ethical, social and legal principles that provide the basis of cosmic moral social order, which is believed to sustain the universe. The social significance of this fundamental concept is its manifestation in the structure of social relationships known as caste. In the social context, it refers to a set of obligations, an appropriate mode of conduct defined by birth - the fundamental fact of human existence. This set of duties is determined by the social status (*varna*), the stage of life (*ashrama*), and the qualities of inborn nature (*guna*). Furthermore, in classical Hindu social thought, the religio-political system is integrated; each of the economic and political roles in society has its set of moral responsibilities or dharma. For instance, the prime duty of the king is to uphold the dharma of the social whole. This was enunciated by the Hindu political theorist Kautilya in *Arth-sastra* in the fourth century B.C.

The Hindu concept of dharma is interpreted differently by other religious traditions in India. The Buddhists acknowledge dharma (*dhamma* in Pali) as the foundation of the universe; dhamma as a cosmic law is not linked with belief in the supernatural but affirms non-violence (*ahimsa*) and compassion as supreme values. In the Jain tradition, the core of dharma is formed by the notion of non-violence (*ahimsa*). It also connotes a spatial category - an eternal respect for the movement of life. This explains the belief that every care and precaution must be taken to preserve all forms of life substance - earth, water and wind. The Sikhs refer to the term *dharam* to describe their way of life, which is the same for all Sikhs, irrespective of differences in their social situation. Dharma, or moral duty, is the first of the five domains (*khanda*) that constitute life space. The others include the domains of spiritual knowledge, human effort, divine benevolence, and truth. The Sikh faith sanctions sacrifice in defence of dharma. The small sword carried by some Sikhs symbolises a form of defence of dharma.

4) Belief in Rebirth or Reincarnation

The concept of rebirth is associated with the cyclical conception of time and the belief in karma. Human deeds/actions cannot find fruition in one life. Rebirth is part of an endless chain of existence - of transformation and continuity, determined by karma. It is a privilege to be born a human being because it is the only opportunity to attain liberation from the cycle of reincarnation. The essential self in man (*atman*, also referred to as soul) and the ultimate Reality are one. Liberation from the cycle of rebirths is attained through an individual's complete realization of the self with the Supreme Being. The highest spiritual goal is escape from the cycle of history. Spiritual liberation (*moksha*) pertains to the man's essential self, the

higher level of reality. Whereas the three key ends of man - the expression of man's natural instincts (kama), material prosperity (artha), and the ethical life (dharma), pertain to the empirical, lower life. It is worth noting that worldly concern such as politics pertains to lower life.

5) The Concept of Truth

Indian thought acknowledges the existence of many levels of truth, although all truth is one. This is based on the assumption that all human beings do not possess an equal moral, spiritual, mental or physical ability to perceive truth. Moreover, the availability of truth is determined by the social position of the individual. The concept of truth has frequently been fused with the notion of toleration - the supposedly unique characteristic of Indian civilization. Just as the underlying conception of hierarchy marks the concept of truth. Similarly, all social practices are encapsulated within a Hindu cosmological realm, but in a hierarchical arrangement, some gaining a superior and others an inferior position.

Ainslie Embree maintains that these fundamental values interweave with each other producing an unchanging pattern to Indian life. This characterizes the unique, self-contained universe of Indian civilization. Embree describes three historical encounters of Indian civilization with alien values and institutions. These great historical moments in Indian history are: first, the coming of Islam to India from the 8th to 12th century, second, the establishment of political power by the Portuguese in 16th century and third, the 18th century, when the East India Company was set up. Embree concludes his examination by suggesting that despite these

powerful foreign influences there is little evidence of absorption or synthesis of the central core of the indigenous religious and cultural tradition. Thus, Embree presents an argument on the unyielding response of Indian civilization and the inflexible, uniform nature of its systems of belief.

Our discussion on the changing conception of time and history reveals the fluid nature of these cultural conceptions. In fact, these paradigms were formulated at a particular historical moment and the variations in these paradigms signify periods of historic and social change. Let us consider another example to make our point. Eminent Indian historian, Romila Thapar, suggests that there is no standard original version of the great Vedic epic, Ramayana.[9] It has an uncertain origin, as an oral form of narrative. It was altered and refashioned several times. She maintains that the transformation of the different variations is indicative of historical and social change. She argues, texts such as the Ramayana had a much more open method of preservation. Its oral memorization did not preclude changes and later interpolations such as perorations on good government and the observance of the rules of dharma. Romila Thapar's persuasive historical perspective on *Rama-katha*, the story of Rama, suggests that a systematic standard version - the north Indian, Hindu Vaishnava version, of the epic is very recent. This has been exacerbated through the powerful government run medium of television which has elevated this uniform version to a national status. Its usage has been moulded to contemporary tastes and values in confirmation of Romila Thapar's view on the changes interpolated in the

[9]Romila Thapar, 'A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rama', in *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhumi Issue*, Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., New Delhi, 1991, pp.141-63.

epics, at specific historical moments, appropriate to the particular social requirements and changing values in society.

Bearing in mind the qualifications noted earlier, Embree's analysis is useful in identifying the core cosmological principles and values that provide meaning to human existence in India. Furthermore, by tracing their relationship to the social and political sphere some general inferences may be drawn. The discussion so far points to the holistic, all embracing character of the Indian world view. In the voluminous discourse of Indian religious tradition the religious domain encompasses and is superior to all other domains of life. The claim that this is distinct to Indian civilization may not be historically valid. The religious world-view displays significant regional and cultural diversity and has been subjected to historical change and alteration. The questions that emerge are: What is the interplay between religion and modern democratic institutions? What aspects reinforce religious discourse with the political discourse? Where and how do politics and religion meet?

III
Interplay Between Religion and Modern Democratic Institutions

Having provided a rough picture of the context of cultural beliefs and practices, we are now ready to consider the historical context in which religion and politics have colluded in India. An analysis of the relationships between religion and politics in India over the past two centuries would have to take into account phenomena of great diversity and complexity. One part of this subject would deal with an examination of the role of the

nationalist movement in transmitting religious identities. Another important aspect would involve a closer examination of the political system - the various legal and constitutional structures that resulted because of the success of the nationalist movement. Religious loyalties would have to be examined as a factor in political behaviour, especially during elections and the legislative procedure.

1) The Anti-colonial Nationalist Movement for the Struggle for India's Independence

The sanguinary division of the imperial state of British India into the national states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh heralded the creation of parliamentary democracy in South Asia. The creation of Pakistan as a homeland for Indian Muslims was a demonstration of how the vocabulary of political and social discourse in the subcontinent is rooted in religion. Since the beginning of modern politics in India, in the nineteenth century, the narrative of the nation has been derived from religious identification. This is true for all religious communities in India - the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Buddhists. This characteristic of Indian nationalism had fateful political consequences.

The antipathy that developed between Hindus and Muslims as nationalism gained momentum is vital in understanding the nature of communal politics in India. Central to the anti-colonial nationalist movement was the creation of a specific notion of 'India - the nation'. For most of its history, India was not governed by a single centralised monarchy, instead there were numerous small princedoms. This made it possible for Muslim rulers from Central Asia and Persia, including the Moghul dynasties that ruled during the

sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, to establish great empires, by forming alliances with local kings.

The dominant version of Indian nationalism, articulated by leaders of the Indian National Congress, imagined an Indian nation based on a shared ethnic culture. From its very beginning, the discourse on the Indian nation-state corresponded with discourse on the majority Hindu religious tradition, which was believed to be marked by a tolerant, indigenous religious pluralism. Therefore, one religion formed the basis of national identity. The national anthem, *Bande Mataram* (Hail mother), was selected by the Indian National Congress, despite the poem's strong Hindu emphasis. Indian nationalism is suffused with images that glorify the Hindu Indian past. I will now consider how this notion of India, enunciated by the Hindu nationalists, was a reflection of the nineteenth century misunderstanding of the attitude of the Hindu religion toward other religious faiths.

i) The question of Hindu tolerance?

The nineteenth century view that Indian civilization was characterised by a tolerant spirituality represents a classic orientalist reading of Indian religion. Influenced by the Enlightenment and seeking the roots of Western civilization in the Vedic scriptures, orientalist historiography brought the methods and concepts of modern science to interpret India's past. Sir William Jones discovered the affiliation between Greek, Latin and Sanskrit. This interpretation of early Indian society as essentially 'pluralist' and 'toler-ant' promotes a specific view of religion as a universal characteristic of one great Indian spirituality. Different religions are then seen as manifestations of this universal Indian

spirituality. The notion of religion as a spiritual experience and the different religious communities that comprise the Indian nation are refractions of one supreme universal Indian spirituality. This unifying essence, that marks the spirit of India is, however, equated with Hinduism and is regarded as a central feature of Hindu religion. This pervasive understanding of Hindu tolerance is a product of a specific orientalist history of ideas, which embrace the older notions of Hinduism as an inclusive religion. As Paul Hacker, an eminent Indologist observes, 'tolerance' is a weak term for what he refers to as Hindu 'inclusiveness'. The significance of this inclusivist tendency lies in its purpose as a hermeneutic device to serve nineteenth and twentieth century social and political circumstances. This view was promoted largely by the great German philosophers and by the Indian nationalists. It laid the foundation for the Hindu nationalist interpretation of Indian history. Furthermore, this scholarly discourse portrays Hinduism as a civilization rather than a religion. This broad definition transcends doctrinal, regional and organizational differences.

This view was espoused by Mahatma Gandhi, the great ideologue of Indian nationalism. His understanding of the universal morality of the Hindu scriptures was based on an orientalist reading. He promulgated the Bhagwad Gita as the fundamental scripture of modern Hinduism. His political style successfully appropriated Hindu ethical values, such as those he referred to as *satyagraha* (the force of truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) in situations of political conflict. His particular genius lay in widening the nationalist appeal beyond its sectarian origins. This allowed self-identification of a large section of the Indian population. Mahatma Gandhi endorsed the political ideal of *ramrajya*, the social

order of the divine Hindu king, Lord Rama, the hero of the Hindu epic Ramayana, in the epic city of Ayodhya. Gandhi's tolerant and pluralistic version, cast in the idiom of Hindu spirituality, encompassed different religious traditions. This inclusivist tendency is in turn reflected in modern Hindu nationalism which incorporates Indians of different faiths - Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs into Hinduism. This is presented as the 'tolerance' that characterises Hinduism. Yet in practice religious differences are not tolerated.

It was precisely Mahatma Gandhi's inclusivist Hindu tolerance that alienated the Muslim League. On the one hand, it was considered legitimate by leaders of the Indian National Congress to impart a Hindu colouration to Indian nationalism. On the other hand, they denied a similar possibility of a fusion of personal identity with a cultural core to other religious communities. They rejected the idea that Muslims found their identity through membership in a religious community. The two-nation theory, articulated by M.A. Jinnah, suggested that the Muslims and the Hindus were separate nations. This became the ideological basis for the demand for Pakistan and offered to the Muslims the possibility of identifying socio-religious community with nationality.

Therefore, the claim that religious strife was a creation of imperialism had fateful consequences. Gandhi's assassination in 1948 by a former member of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) [10], a radical Hindu organization, for his alleged accomodation towards the Muslims, is the most startling example of what is now referred to as the Hindu backlash phenomenon in modern Indian politics. Therefore, the dominant Indian

[10]RSS was founded in 1925 and aimed at training young men to revive traditional Hindu ethical values. It was based in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and largely consisted of urban, middle class Hindus.

nationalist leaders rejected the idea that religious nationalism was a component of the fabric of Indian culture and historical experience. The question of Hindu tolerance was therefore, more than an academic discussion of the nature of a religious world view; momentous political issues concerning the rights of minorities were obscured by the assertion that Hinduism was uniquely tolerant and willing to absorb other systems into itself.[11]

2) Association Between Group Identity and Political Power

i) What is meant by representative government in the Indian context?

In the proceeding section we have seen how the emphasis on tolerance of Indian vis-à-vis Hindu civilisation, was a central component of Indian nationalism. The central ideological commitment and legacy of the anti-colonial nationalist movement, was the notion of secularism, which corresponded with the discourse on Hindu spirituality and tolerance. That national identity transcended religious identity was the key element in the ideology of the Indian National Congress. In their attempt to create a unifying ideology they denied that religious differences were a source of conflict. We shall now consider how this idea of a secular, tolerant India, which was central to the Indian nationalist movement was reflected in the legal and political structure of independent India.

The Indian state was to be religiously neutral. The state would not discriminate on the basis of religion. The separation between the church and state in no way denied the significance of religion for society. Religion played, and continues to play a significant

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[11]A.T. Embree, *Utopias in Conflict*, p. 23.

social and political role. The state was to represent different communities in democratic institutions, such as the legal system and the educational system. On the one hand, the Indian constitution gave its citizens the constitutional right to profess and practice their religion. On the other hand, Article 25 of the Indian Constitution states that reference to Hindus or to Hindu religious institutions should be construed as incorporating persons professing the Buddhist, Jain or Sikh religions. Not surprisingly, the minorities have expressed apprehension on the arbitrary manner in which they are defined as Hindus under Article 25 of the Constitution. In January 1984, the Akali Dal led a campaign in which this portion of the constitution was burnt. Thus, they alleged that the cultural domination of the numerically dominant Hindu majority is manifested in politics in India.

ii) Nature of political representation

The form of representative government was first instituted in India in 1909 through the Morley Minto reforms. This preceded a long struggle between the Muslim leadership, who demanded separate electorates to ensure a share of power to the Muslims in the new government, and the Congress Party. Leaders of the Indian National Congress insisted on the establishment of representative government based on the Western model, with the will of the numerical majority being the will of the people. This suited the Hindu leadership, as decisions expressed through the legislature would be those of the majority Hindu voters. Under the Morley Minto reforms, separate electorates were established for the Muslims and subsequently for Sikhs, scheduled castes, Anglo-Indians and other minority groups. The interests of the minorities could be safeguarded by this constitutional device which

recognized a religious community as a separate political unit. The concept that the groups have rights which cannot be contested by the decision of majority voters as expressed through the legislature expresses the understanding that the nation is an aggregate of groups and not individuals.

Since the attainment of independence in 1947, the government of India, in the Constituent Assembly, decided to abandon separate electorates and reservation of seats in legislatures for the religious minorities. Reserved constituencies were reallocated for other minorities, such as the scheduled castes and tribes. This antagonized the Sikhs who had once been beneficiaries of reservations. The implications of the policy of proportional recruitment were strikingly evident in the armed forces where Sikhs comprised 15 per cent of the military, although they comprised just two per cent of the total population of India.

The question of political representation for religious minorities calls into question certain assumptions of democratic representation. The theory of democratic representation assumes that the elected legislators will serve all of their constituents impartially. Since, religious minorities in India are not in a position to mobilize a majority of voters, the present imperfect state of India's secularity does not allow some legitimate interests and grievances of minority groups to be adequately voiced.

Indian politics was in the 1950s driven by the movement of linguistic groups seeking statehood. This resulted in a massive territorial reorganization of India's internal political structure in 1956. The formation of separate states transformed many linguistic minorities into majorities. States were established for all linguistic groups listed in Schedule VIII of the Constitution, with the exception of Punjabi, Sindhi and

Urdu speakers. The possibility of a Punjabi speaking state was denied because of the threat that Sikhs would form a majority in that state. This resulted in a ten year long struggle by the Sikhs which finally culminated in the linguistic reorganisation of Punjab in November 1966.

So far we have made some general observations on one category of response of Hinduism to the pressures historically associated with the social and political changes generated by the British Raj. This response was institutionally represented by India's Congress party, which has been the major force in the politics of post-independence India. The affinity between the Hindus and the Congress Party existed throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and in fact, exists even today. This point is forcefully illustrated in an editorial in one of the leading English newspapers after the assassination of Mrs.Gandhi on 31 October 1984, 'every time the minorities become assertive, Hindus tend to consolidate behind the Congress despite its professed commitment to secular values'.[12] Bruce Graham, in his book *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics* (1990) has argued against the widely held view that competing loyalties of caste, sect, dialect, region and language prevented the Hindus from acting as a political community. Against this he maintains that Hindus, and particularly those in the northern states, did indeed see themselves as a political community but they also saw the Congress Party rather than any one of the Hindu nationalist parties as their principal defender.[13]

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[12]B.D. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh*, Cambridge University Press,1990, pp. 255,256.
[13]Ibid., p. 255.

IV

The Resurgence of Religious Nationalism in Contemporary India

Let us now turn to the second category of response, represented by the Hindu radical right. Bruce Graham, in his book *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics* (1990), has examined the factors which prevented the establishment of the Hindu political right as the party of the numerically dominant Hindu community in the 1950s and 1960s. His focus is on emergence and growth of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (Indian People's Party, BJS), the most robust of the first generation of Hindu nationalist parties. He concludes that the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, restricted itself to the north Indian brand of Hindu nationalism and failed to transcend the limited appeal of its founding doctrines to broaden its electoral constituency. Graham suggests that in order to develop as a significant force in national politics, the Hindu radical right will have to become more democratic and moderate. The 1980s national politics in India is witnessing precisely this expansion of the religious right. The phase of communal politics in contemporary India is marked by the smashing electoral success of the Hindu radical right, which is close to outflanking the ruling Congress party for the first time in the history of India. Although there is nothing new in the response of the Hindu radical right, the novelty is in its striking success in Indian electoral politics. We

shall now consider the philosophy, programme and tactics employed by the Hindu radical right in achieving success in electoral politics.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, or BJP) was formed in April 1990 and is probably the largest religious nationalist movement in the world. It has an alliance with three other Hindu nationalist organizations, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council, or VHP), largely comprising religious leaders, the Shiv Sena, a fanatic Hindu political party, powerful in Bombay and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Organization, or RSS), a militant youth organization. The VHP was founded in 1964, as an organization to represent marginal religious groups by the leaders of a Hindu missionary sect. Only in the 1980s was it transformed into a political organization. It offers connections with religious groups and a network of monastic holy men and other workers in other Hindu political parties. The VHP is probably the strongest transnational movement among Hindus in the world.

The BJP's smashing electoral success has in the past three general elections seen its strength go up from 2 seats in the Indian parliament in the election of 1984 to 119 in 1991, out of a total of 545 seats, becoming the largest opposition party in India. In the recent assembly elections in March 1995, the BJP has established government in four states which account for 107 of the 545 Lok Sabha seats. It is the main opposition party in five other state legislatures which account for half of the country's population. The formidable Shiv-Sena-BJP coalition that has emerged in the recent state elections in Maharashtra, brought an end to 35 years of uninterrupted rule by the Congress (I) party. Shiv Sena won nearly half of its seats in Bombay, India's most liberal and cosmopolitan

city. The Shiv Sena, derives its name from Shivaji, a seventeenth century Hindu king of the Marathas from Maharashtra who fought valiantly against the Mogul invaders. Bal Thackeray, the leader of the Shiv Sena, claimed in an interview that the mobs that attacked the Muslims in Bombay were under his control and that if Muslims 'behaved like Jews in Nazi Germany', there would be 'nothing wrong if they are treated as Jews were in Germany'.

The sharp regional contrasts in India apply to modern electoral politics as well. The overwhelming bulk of the BJP support has, so far, come from the north and west Indian, largely Hindi speaking states. 'Of the BJP members of the Indian parliament chosen in the last election, more than 90 per cent came from just eight states and union territories in the north and west of India (more than 40 per cent from one state - the large Uttar Pradesh alone).'[14]Observers of modern electoral politics explain these regional contrasts with regard to the regional variation in the historical experience. It is argued that the Mughal empire never extended to the south and was relatively weak in the east. By contrast, the Hindu rulers in the north and west persistently waged battles against the Mughal empire.

Recent interviews given by the BJP leaders indicate that the BJP is bracing itself for the election year by shedding its traditional image - with emphasis purely on *hindutva*. It wants to broaden its political constituency 'by fighting off casteism, pseudo-secularism, communism, corruption and the criminalisation of politics'.[15]

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[14]A. Sen, 'The Threats to Secular India', *Social Scientist*, vol. 21, nos. 3-4, March 11,1993, p.9.
[15]The newsmagazine, *India Today*, 30 April,1995.

The Hindu radical right maintains that the Hindus have lived through dark ages for a very long time. The Turkic invaders dominated the political system for 500 years and brought Islamic religion and Persian culture into India. Subsequently, the British established political power in the nineteenth century and India continues to be colonised by the English educated establishment, or '*bhadralok*'. It holds that the Hindu ancestral faith is compatible with modern values and ideologies. It plans to modernize Indian society; this however, they claim will be done in a true 'Hindu spirit' rather than by values and programs which are western imports.

The BJP has declared *hindutva* as its ideology. The term *hindutva* is central to their claims that religion is the defining characteristic of the Indian nation. V.D.Savarkar, leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, the most important Hindu nationalist party before independence, advanced the term *hindutva*, which equates religious and national identities. According to this Hindu *rashtra*, or 'Hindu nation' theory, Indian culture has its roots in the Hindu past. 'India is God's chosen land; it's the abode of Hindus.'[16]Hence, the ethical and spiritual values of all Indians who have ancestral roots in India derive from the Hindu culture. In essence all Indians are Hindus. Irrespective of their mode of worship, Christians and Muslims are culturally Hindus. Hindu revivalists seek to incorporate Indians of various faiths into Hinduism. The notion that the Indian nation is the heir to Hindu civilization is a perpetuation of the politics of inclusion discussed in the previous section. On 11 December, 1995, the Supreme Court of India passed a landmark verdict on whether

[16]Ashok Singhal, Vishva Hindu Parishas(VHP) chief, quoted in the Weekly Magazine, *Outlook*, 27 December 1995, p.16.

or not appeal on votes based on *hindutva* was permissible in election campaigns. The apex court's judgement was particularly significant as it has come virtually on the eve of the general elections in India. The court endorsed the use of the term *hindutva* on the ground that *hindutva* was a broad philosophical term synonymous with 'Indianisation'. The Supreme Court observed that unlike the credal religions, Hinduism does not claim any one prophet, nor does it subscribe to any specific dogmas, or a central authority, or organization. The court's interpretation of *hindutva* has given an impetus to the *hindutva* brigade of the BJP and the Shiv Sena and has significant electoral implications. L.K.Advani, the party chief of BJP observed gleefully, 'The judgement is a seal of judicial imprimatur to the BJP's ideology of *hindutva.* The BJP believes India is one country and that Indians are one people. We hold that the basis of this unity is our ancient culture. For us this nationalism is not just a geographical or political concept. It is essentially a cultural concept. Whether you call it Hindutva or Bharatiyata or Indianness, the nomenclature does not matter. It is all the same.'[17] The Supreme Court verdict has raised fears that the forthcoming election campaign will witness more communal vitriol and will encourage the use of religion in politics.

Not suprisingly, over the last few years the term *hindutva* has evolved a distinct anti-minorities connotation. By defining other religious faiths, such as the Sikhs, the Buddhists and the Jains as part of the all-embracing Hindu civilization, they seek to incorporate them within the majoritarian Hindu fold. They claim that Muslims and Christians should accept that they are, in fact, converted Hindus and redeem themselves by

[17]Quoted in the Weekly Magazine, *Outlook*, 27 December 1995, p.13.

joining the Hindu fold. They endorse the movement for the reconversion of Muslims and Christians and for the Hinduization of tribals. The VHP has consistently worked to draw the tribals and untouchables into the Hindu fold. The VHP blames the conversion of tribal north eastern parts of India by Christian missions as the cause for insurgency in those areas. It is perhaps worth noting that B.D.Ambedkar had rejected somewhat similar attempts made by Gandhi to improve the status of scheduled castes within the framework of Hinduism.

Another key feature of the radical Hindu right is the assertion of Hindu solidarity. By stressing the solidarity of 'one caste' (*ek jat*) of coreligionists, Hindu nationalists attempt to homogenize themselves against 'other castes', such as the Muslims, the Christians, the Europeans, who they allege pose a grave threat to the survival of Mother India (*Bharat Mata*). Therefore, the Hindu attitude of religious exclusiveness is partly rooted in the traditional social pattern of group exclusiveness i.e..caste. This attitude of group exclusiveness is legitimised by Hindu religious beliefs. The Hindu nationalists claim that concessions being made to the minority groups threaten the Hindu majority and they seek to redress this imbalance. Crucial to the militant Hindu programme is the demand for a universal civil code that would apply Hindu traditional institutions of family and law to all Indians, including the Muslims. They also demand compulsory national Hindu holidays.

Centres of worship are the foci of religious identities. The Hindu nationalist parties have launched a campaign to reconstitute the sacred space through contests over sacred sites. Referring to the Ayodhya issue, Peter van der Veer has argued that the VHP gained momentum through the use of religious discourse and practice of mass ritual action in the

political arena. The centre of the dispute was Babri Masjid, a mosque built by a lieutenant of Emperor Babar, founder of the Mughal dynasty in 1528, in the North Indian pilgrim center of Ayodhya, the capital of Lord Rama. Its symbolic significance is attested by the fact that the site of the mosque is alleged to be the birth place of Lord Rama. The campaign consisted of religious processions (*yatras*). A rally organized by the VHP and the BJP, resulted in the demolition of this ancient edifice on 6 December 1992. The triumphant aftermath of the Hindu nationalists led to the outbreak of violence in which over 300 people lost their lives. The broadcasting of the *Ramayana* in the form of a serial on the national network television, which began in January 1987, dramatized the Ayodhya issue. These attempts further reflect efforts of the Hindu nationalists to reinterpret India's turbulent Mughal past. They allege that Muslim rulers destroyed many Hindu temples, and the search is now on for new historical facts which establish these claims. In states where the BJP is politically powerful, a revision of school textbooks which stress the devastation caused by the Mughal emperors has apparently taken place.

i) Religious functionaries in politics

Commenting on the pattern of relationship between the church and the state in South Asia, Donald Smith concludes, 'In general, the more highly organized the majority religion, the greater the degree of clerical involvement in politics.'[18] This view was widely held among Western scholars, until recently. Given that Hindu religion was not centred around a powerful church and there was a total lack of centralised ecclesiastical institutions, how

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[18] D.E. Smith, ed., *South Asian Politics and Religion*, p.4.

was the participation of Hindu saints or monks (*sadhus*) in the political process to be explained? Peter van der Veer makes an interesting remark on this development, 'While politicians have for decades used a saintly facade, only now have saints come to reveal themselves openly as politicians.'[19]Recent events in India reveal that clerical participation, both by individuals and organized groups in politics, has assumed national prominence.

Peter van der Veer explains this phenomena by stressing the role of traditional mediators, like a body of guru lineages and holy men, in articulating and transmitting the beliefs and social practices, in Hinduism, as well as Islam, across a huge and culturally diverse region. In Islam, the significant difference is that all orders endorse a central sacred authority - the universal revelation of the Prophet, which he suggests, allows for more centralisation. The Hindu clergy is composed of a wide variety of religious functionaries comprising temple priests, *gurus* (personal spiritual preceptors), family priests, astrologers, *sadhus* (holy men). Religious identities continue to be transmitted through these holy men working through a network of sacred centres, alongside migration, pilgrimage, print and visual media. Thus, those features that were believed to preclude the political involvement of priests have evolved means to translate the spiritual authority and social prestige of priests into political influence.

ii) Forms of Ritual communication

Ritual discourse and practice are modes of religious communication which transmit ideas of personhood and self. Peter van der Veer contends that religious nationalism in India in

[19]Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, p. 98.

the nineteenth and twentieth century fuses forms of religious identity and discourse on the nation. This process involves the perpetual transformation of pre-existing forms of religious identity through the ritual construction of identity. Religious nationalism, by introducing the notion of the nation as an extension of the self, therefore, reinforces cosmological understandings - dealing with birth and death, illness etc.. According to van der Veer, "The articulation of religious meaning and practice is part of a historical construction of nationalist identities" (Peter van der Veer 1994:84).

The Hindu radical right is increasingly invoking the symbolic universe of community rituals in order to disseminate its message. In this manner, the ritual repertoire engages the accepted Hindu conceptions to communicate the message of Hindu unity. For instance, a basic concern for a modern nation-state is territorial integrity. Religious colouring is imparted to the geographical integrity of India by claiming that it is Hindu cultural identity that unifies the Indian nation. The BJP glorifies the sacred geography of India, through *yatras* (pilgrimage in procession). The unity of Hindu India is signified through all the rivers in India which are symbolically connected with the holy river, Ganges. The BJP processions followed well-known pilgrimage routes that link major religious centres, suggesting the geographical unity of India (*bharatvarsha*) as a sacred area (*kshetra*) of Hindus. In this way, pilgrimage was effectively transformed into a ritual of national integration. As part of the celebration of temple festival in India, processions of temple chariots (*rathas*) bearing an image of a Hindu deity are taken for a ride in his domain. This ride confirms the territorial sovereignty of the deity. The procession of the

VHP invoked a similar use of *rathas* in the form of brand-new trucks.[20] The VHP procession made use of the existing symbolism of mother India, characteristic of worship of Hindu goddesses.

The discussion thus far has attempted to discern the general pattern of religio-political developments in the modern history of India. We have noted some attempts made by the elites to reconcile Western (political) ideas to indigenous (religious) values. We may conclude this section by referring to Donald Smith's succinct comment on the interaction between religion and politics in India. He maintains that politicians attempt to secure the legitimisation of Western political ideologies by associating them with religion.[21]Moreover, we have seen how the Hindu metaphysical principles have supported the dominant political ideology i.e.. democracy in India. These points serve merely to illustrate the many different kinds of relationships between religion and politics in the recent history of India. We must now proceed to examine the factors that account for the explosion of religious nationalism in contemporary India. There are three important points to be made here.

V

The Resurgence of Religious Nationalism at This Moment in History

Over and beyond the concrete historical conditions at this given moment in India's history, there are world-wide conditions, such as the state of economic and technological ingenuity prevailing in other parts of the world, that influence heavily the prospects of development

[20]Ibid., pp.124-125.
[21]D.E. Smith, ed., *South Asian Politics and Religion*,p. 36.

of new political ideologies. However, our consideration is on examining the specific historical conditions and processes that have exacerbated the use of religion in politics in contemporary India. We have already discussed the use of the apparatus of the modern state - political parties with mass-disseminated ideologies, legislative bodies, universal adult franchise in whipping up communal passions using religion.

1) The Weakening of Political Institutions

i) Organizational decline of the Congress party

In the earlier sections we have seen that the Congress party has been the single dominant political party since India's independence, until well into the 1980s. There is little scope here to go into the history and development of what scholars label the 'Congress System'.[22] Two general inferences bear relevance to our inquiry. First, observers of Indian politics have noted the authoritarianism and centralization promoted by the personal political style of Mrs.Gandhi and her predecessors, as part of the Congress Nehru dynastic culture (Paul Brass 1982, Atul Kohli 1990, Rudolph and Rudolph 1987). Although other factors linked to the development of the political process, such as constitutional features and the development of central government institutions i.e.. the

[22]This term has been coined by Rajni Kothari, eminent Indian political scientist. For further details see Rajni Kothari, 'The Congress 'System' in India',*Asian Survey*,4:12 December 1964,pp.1161-73. Paul Brass notes that it is a misnomer to regard the Congress party as one-party dominant system. He points out,'there has never really been a single, national party system but instead each region of the country has had its own distictive party system in most of which the Congress was the dominant party, but itself had a distinctive social base and pattern of relationship with opposition parties in each state', P.R. Brass, *The politics of India since Independence*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.69. We must note that the Congress of Mrs.Gandhi became known as Congress (I) for Indira, after the split in the party in 1977.

Planning Commission, have also enhanced the centralizing role of the national government. Second, the Congress Party has often been charged for failing to take adequate political measures prior to the outburst of ethnic strife. Indeed, critics have gone further to say that government actions often precipitated the violence which was then used by the government to justify the use of force and thereby win popular credit for restoring law and order. In the case of Punjab, these included attempts of the Congress leaders to exclude the Akali Dal from political power by encouraging Bhindranwale. Indeed, some critics have attributed the conflict in Punjab to the massive Congress government intervention in the state.[23]

Myron Weiner suggests that these criticisms highlight the inability of a weakened governing party to share power with minorities, and the temptation on the part of some government supporters to encourage ethnic strife so as to justify central government intervention, and to win support from majority communities.[24] His rather pessimistic conclusion is that the weakening of political institutions is likely to intensify ethnic conflict in India.

ii) The state as an arbitrator of ethnic conflict: The strength of the state to respond impartially

In recent years, the minorities have repeatedly charged the administrative services and police for taking a partisan attitude towards minorities. The minorities accuse the police of

[23]For evidence about the role of the Congress Party in exacerbating the conflict in Punjab, see, Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle*, New Delhi, 1985,pp.57-83. The situation in Punjab raises some fundamental questions regarding the nature of center-state relations in India. These aspects are addressed in Chapter four.

[24]M. Weiner, 'India's Minorities: Who Are They? What Do They Want?', in *India 2000*, edited by James R.Roach, p.126.

not ensuring their protection. On the other hand, the media reports confirm that the police have participated in attacks on minorities or have provided support to the attackers. There is considerable evidence that the police in India have become increasingly politicised. The collusion of sections of the Congress party against minorities was starkly evident in the attacks against the Sikhs following the assassination of Mrs.Gandhi in October 1984. Independent investigating teams published evidence of organized efforts involving 'important politicians of the Congress (I) at the top and by authorities in the administration.'[25]Educated Hindus increasingly view the exercise of military force by the Indian government as a necessary reassertion of Hindu authority. This view was evident in the reactions to the pogroms against the Sikhs after Mrs.Gandhi's assassination. Rajiv Gandhi defended the Hindu mobs by claiming during the election campaign that when a great tree falls, the ground will quake. The participation of police is evident in the attacks on Muslims in metropolitan cities of Bombay, Delhi.[26]

Furthermore, the central government has increasingly turned to the armed forces to deal with ethnic conflict. Following the June 1984 military assault on the Golden Temple, government sources put the figure of Sikhs who deserted the army to 5,000, of which 102 were killed. The mutiny of Sikh soldiers demonstrates the considerable risks entailed in the

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[25]P.Wallace, 'Centre-State Relations in India: The federal dilemma', in *India 2000: The next fifteen years*, James R.Roach, ed., Maryland, 1986, p. 153.

[26] The Indian Press recorded partisan pro-Hindu instructions by senior officers to policemen at trouble spots in Bombay during well-organized attacks on Muslims by the Hindu extremist groups.For further evidence on the support for Hindu nationalism by state institutions which seriously puts into doubt the religious neutrality of the Indian state,see Peter van der Veer,*Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, pp. 152-162.

intense use of the armed forces to arbitrate ethnic strife. Finally, this usually accompanies the suspension of democratic procedures such as the state government and the censoring of the press. Punjab provides a test case for the imposition of new ordinances and legislations. The most notable of these are the National Security (Second Amendment) Ordinance, promulgated on July 14,1984 under which Punjab was declared a terrorist affected area. These acts, maintains the People's Union for Civil Liberties in Delhi, can be used 'against dissenters and for narrow political ends by the ruling party.'[27]This is an indication of the considerable erosion of democratic institutions in India.

2) Loss of Faith in Secular Institutions

The goals of the political and social institutions of the secular state are social justice, democracy and secularism. The anti-colonial nationalist movement in India had promised political freedom, economic prosperity and social justice, once India attained independence. James Mayall, in his well-known book, *Nationalism and International Society* (1990), has underlined the point that soon after independence, the central political concern in the post-colonial world shifted from constitutional to economic issues. The reason for this was that, 'Once alien rule had been dislodged, the new rulers faced the oldest question in politics: by what right do you rule? In the heady atmosphere of the anti-colonial struggle, the organisation of a movement for self-government had been sufficient legitimisation; once the goal had been achieved something more was required to underpin

[27]P.Wallace, 'Centre-State Relations in India: The federal dilemma', in *India 2000*, James R.Roach, ed., p.153.

the exercise of power.'[28]It was in this context that India embarked on the ambitious programme for rapid economic development - the second five-year plan in 1956. Not only were these programmes of industrial modernisation flawed, but the post-colonial states were increasingly marginalised within the western dominated international economy. Although India is now close to approaching the fiftieth anniversary of its independence, the fiscal and social crisis has only deepened.

The most prominent feature of Indian political culture in recent years is the emergence of the hegemonic Indian state. The state not only monopolises all social resources but usurps a large proportion of its resources. Modern institutions are widely associated with corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy, largely responsible to self-seeking politicians. The inefficiency and lack of public sensitivity of the Indian state is attributed to the working of an unreconstructed colonial style bureaucracy. The non-performance of the political system is further pinned to over-centralization.[29] Disenchantment with modern institutions of the state has induced the urgent need to assert discipline and order.

i) A new challenge to secular nationalism?

These developments suggest that the resurgence of religious nationalism at this historical moment may be an attempt to usher in an era of a new moral order. The Hindu nationalist movement in India attempts to reformulate the idiom of modern, secular political order by infusing indigenous moral values derived from religion into public life.

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[28]James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.116.
[29]R. Kothari, *Democratic Polity and Social Change in India: Crisis and Opportunities*, Bombay, 1976, p.25.

The Hindu nationalist parties assert that India should be ruled by the Hindu majority as a Hindu state (*rashtra*). Their political agenda seeks a utopian Hindu nation (*ramrajya*) which they hope will eventually emerge victorious. On the one hand, they morally reject the legitimacy of the modern, secular state. On the other hand, they rely on the accoutrements of western political structure - political parties and elections in order to achieve their objectives. Although the Hindu religious nationalists embrace traditional religious values, they are actively involved in the modern electoral process. They employ modern techniques in their organization and political campaigns.

Why is the alternative form of political organization based on religion? What is the moral purpose of the nation? I take as my starting point perceptive comments on the nature of the nationalist discourse in India, made by two leading South Asian scholars. Mark Juergensmeyer (1993) observes that the nationalism of the colonised countries is a product of the encounter between different conceptions of the socio-political order, one informed by a religious worldview and the other by secular vision of the world. Likewise, Peter van der Veer succinctly remarks, the colonial discourse relates, in one way or another, to the master narrative of progress and modernity, while the indigenous discourses relate to master narratives of salvation.[30] The preceding observations are germane to understanding the collusion between religion and politics in India.

Mark Juergensmeyer has explored the dialectic between what he considers to be two competing frameworks of social order. The first is secular nationalism, allied with the

[30]Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, p.143.

national state and the second is religion, allied with large ethnic communities.[31] Juergensmeyer suggests that both religion and secular nationalism are competing languages of order which claim authority for the social order. Western models of nationhood represent a particular form of political organization in which individuals are linked through a centralized, democratic political system. This political order derives legitimisation through common laws, democratic political processes and a sense of identification with a geographical area. The electoral process as a mode of making decisions is the hallmark of democracy and is well established throughout the world. It is based on the modern democratic principle of majority rule.

There is abundant evidence world-wide to show the persistence of natural religious loyalties despite secular politics. Contemporary India is experiencing not an erosion of religion in public life, rather a resurgence. Both religion and national identity fuse personal and social identity. The utopian vision espoused by religious nationalists appeals because the moral and spiritual goals transcend the materialistic promises of secular nationalists. Religion provides order from the chaos and uncertainty in the world, it is order-restoring and life-affirming. It situates individuals in the great cosmic encounter between sacred and profane, good and evil, life and death. The political system is legitimised by the moral order based on religion. Religious laws form the basis of a moral state.

The interaction between nationalism and religion at a particular historical moment produces social and political conflict. Wherever religious traditions provide the future

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[31]M. Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, California, 1994, p.30.

blueprints for a new social and political order they are opposed by religious groups with equally strong and valid claims upon the future. This inevitably leads to conflict between different groups. These groups also come into conflict with those who espouse the secular or liberal democratic tradition.

Violence in India is not, then, senseless and random. It is a way of changing things, of challenging a recalcitrant political order. In India, as elsewhere in the world at the end of the twentieth century, religions have legitimised violence as people struggle for what they regard as their just claims upon the future. Frustration and fear may have their roots in identifiable economic and social causes which could be ameliorated by secular remedies within the democratic process, but a religious vision can offer a more readily available solution by legitimising the violence that is born of hatred and despair.[32]

3) Religious nationalism as a Strategy for Change or a Form of Protest?

It is vital to recognize the vast territorial diversity and the immense historical complexity of India's distinct state formation. It is difficult to arrive at a valid generalisation about the appeal of the Hindu radical right. The claim that the Hindu radical right appeals to the urban population who endure the pressures of social change requires some qualification. The electoral results in the various states in India suggest that the Hindu nationalist parties appeals widely to the northern, caste Hindu population.[33] The

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[32]For an elaboration of this point, see A.T. Embree, *Utopias in Conflict*, p. 132.

[33]Weiner's statistical projection for the year 2000, extrapolated from current growth rates, indicate that the dominant caste Hindu majority, those who speak the official regional language as their mother tongue will decline from 45% to 52% by the year 2000, as compared with 51 to 58% range in 1971.

March 1995 election results indicate that the Hindu nationalist parties are successfully expanding their regional base and forming coalitions with the more radical, regional variants, such as the recent BJP coalition with the Shiva Sena in Maharashtra.

Scholars are correct in locating the social base of the Hindu religious right in India's rising middle class, which forms nearly twenty per cent of the total population. Achin Vanaik has taken into consideration the distinct admixture of multi-caste, multi-class and multi-regional diversity to define the term 'intermediate castes'. The 'intermediate castes', according to Vanaik, constitute the agrarian bourgeoisie and the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie.[34]

Indian commentators contend that the resurgence of the Hindu right indicates attempts made by the Hindu middle class for a uniform standard religious discourse. 'On the middle classes there has always been a fringe yearning for a nation-state with one religion, one language, and one culture, for that was what the Western societies seemingly had.'[35]The general hypothesis is that the non-European nations yearn to be as successful as the robust, capitalist European nations. This reflects the notion that capitalism is efficacious only in societies that possess similar systems of cultural praxis as those that define the Semitic religious tradition.[36] This is assumed to explain the desire to emulate the political and social systems of the European nations.

[34]A. Vanaik, *The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India*, London, 1990, p.144.
[35]A. Nandy, 'The Political Culture of the Indian State', *Daedalus*, Fall 1989, v.118, n.4, p.13.
[36]This point has been made by Romila Thapar, 'A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rama', in *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhumi Issue*, Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., New Delhi, 1991, pp.141-63.

Let us ask ourselves, can the approach discussed above explain why capitalism has flourished in so many non-Christian societies, such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan? Why has capitalism failed in so many societies characterised by the Semitic religious tradition, such as Poland? Although this view is upheld by eminent Indian social scientists, it reflects the propensity to uncritically universalise from European experience that seems to characterise so much of the social science literature.

In this respect, Ainslie T. Embree's emphasis on religion as an ideology of transition that makes change possible and desirable by providing harmony and cohesiveness in society seems to be close to empirical realities. It forcefully reveals how religious nationalist movements bring about appropriate adjustments in society by affirming and transforming traditional values and belief systems. The appeal of the religious right lies in its vision of the future compared to that offered by the forces of social and political modernization.

Various writers have pointed out that the more rapidly industrialization takes place, the more serious the concomitant social and psychological dislocation, and the greater the degree of protest in a society. A critical stimulus to political action is the tension between aspirations and status. When education is increasing aspirations, economic growth is enlarging economic opportunities, and political democracy is resulting in increased politicization, then one can expect more, not less competition and conflict among India's many social groups.[37]

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[37]M. Weiner, 'India's Minorities: Who Are They? What Do They Want?', in *India 2000*, edited by James R.Roach,p.100.

Political leaders play upon the affective pull of group ties to mobilise a population. This sentiment of combined defensiveness and assertiveness of contemporary Hindus has been tapped by political leaders, particularly by the post-independence Congress leadership. This was evident when for the first time since India's independence the Congress party won a clear majority of votes among caste Hindus in northern India. It was manifest by the support for Congress by the RSS in the December 1984 parliamentary elections. Heightened group consciousness intensifies intergroup conflict only when a group asserts its identity by attacking the identity of other groups, when a claim for political power for the group is perceived as threatening.

The distribution of wealth, education and employment is largely determined by the political process. Ethnic groups seek political power to improve their social status and economic well-being. It is this central feature of political life that induces politicians to mobilise constituencies under the banner of religion. Another factor that makes religious identity a central feature of politics is the notion that other groups are benefiting economically while they themselves are being deliberately excluded. Moreover, politicians have made skilful use of the frustrations of poverty and unemployment to appeal to religious sentiments. The most dramatic example being the carnage of Sikhs in slum areas of Delhi following the assassination of Mrs Gandhi. Both the victims and the killers usually came from the poorest sections, politicians inciting and legitimising the killings in the name of religion. Electoral politics encourages mobilization on the basis of existing identities. As the democratic process has unfolded in India, it has actually retarded the process of

secularization.[38] Finally, we may reiterate that in a developing, rapidly society like India, with her myriad problems, protest inevitably assume grave proportions.

Conclusion

First of all, we considered the five central cultural beliefs and practices which characterise Indian civilization and harness the involvement of religion in modern politics in India. We then examined the historical context i.e.. the social and political changes generated by the British Raj, which provoked the reinterpretation of Hindu religion in the light of western values. The first category of response was institutionally represented by the Congress party. We noted how the anti-colonial nationalist movement, articulated by leaders of the Indian National Congress reconciled western notions of nationalism and secularism with the Hindu system of thought. In this manner, the nation of India was 'imagined' to have its roots in the ancient Hindu past. The modern structures of the independent Indian state were based on the notion of secularism, which corresponded with the discourse of tolerance of Hindu religion. We noted how this emphasis on tolerance that allegedly characterised Hindu religion, in fact, embraced the inclusive attitude of Hindu religion toward other religious faiths.

We then discussed the second category of response of Hinduism to western institutions and values, represented by the Hindu radical right. We noted the stupendous rise of the religious right in India's national politics in the 1980s. The response of the

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[38] A. Vanaik, *The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India*, p.145.

Hindu radical right is marked by a rejection of the Western secularism embraced by the Anglo-Indian élites. On the other hand, it seeks to establish a Hindu state and modernize India in the true Hindu ancestral spirit. We also discussed the implications of the programme of the religious right for the religious minorities in India. These are complex matters with which we have dealt in a cursory manner. But even a brief survey of the interaction of religion and politics in India, can help us discern the emerging patterns and trends. The problem of religious nationalism is likely to mount in a period in which majorities and selected minorities are becoming more self-aware, the international ties of some minorities are growing and political coalitions are in flux.

3
Historical Roots of Sikh Communal Consciousness (1469 - 1947)

Our study attempts to locate the genesis of the present day Sikh ethno-regional movement within the realm of history. The 1980s Sikh movement for sovereignty was not a sudden development. The two subsequent chapters look into the deep social and historical roots linked to the growth of contemporary Sikh self consciousness. This chapter begins with the period of inception of Sikh religion and continues up to the collapse of British rule in Punjab. The chapter is broadly divided into three sections. The first section comprises two parts. The first part deals with the evolution of early Sikh tradition (1469-1708) and the second part examines the consolidation of Sikh political power (1708-1849). The second section explores the growth of Sikh communal consciousness during the colonial period (1849-1947). The social and political changes generated by the British Raj sparked a series of religious reform movements and the nature and impact of these religious reform movements is further examined. The final section considers this historic development and the processes which dramatically altered the quality and incidence of inter-communal relations in the last third of the nineteenth century in Punjab are also examined. Our attempt is to situate the growth of Sikh identity, community and organization within the context of the historic and social forces prevailing during each period of our study. Such an analysis will primarily be concerned with social change and different forms of consciousness.

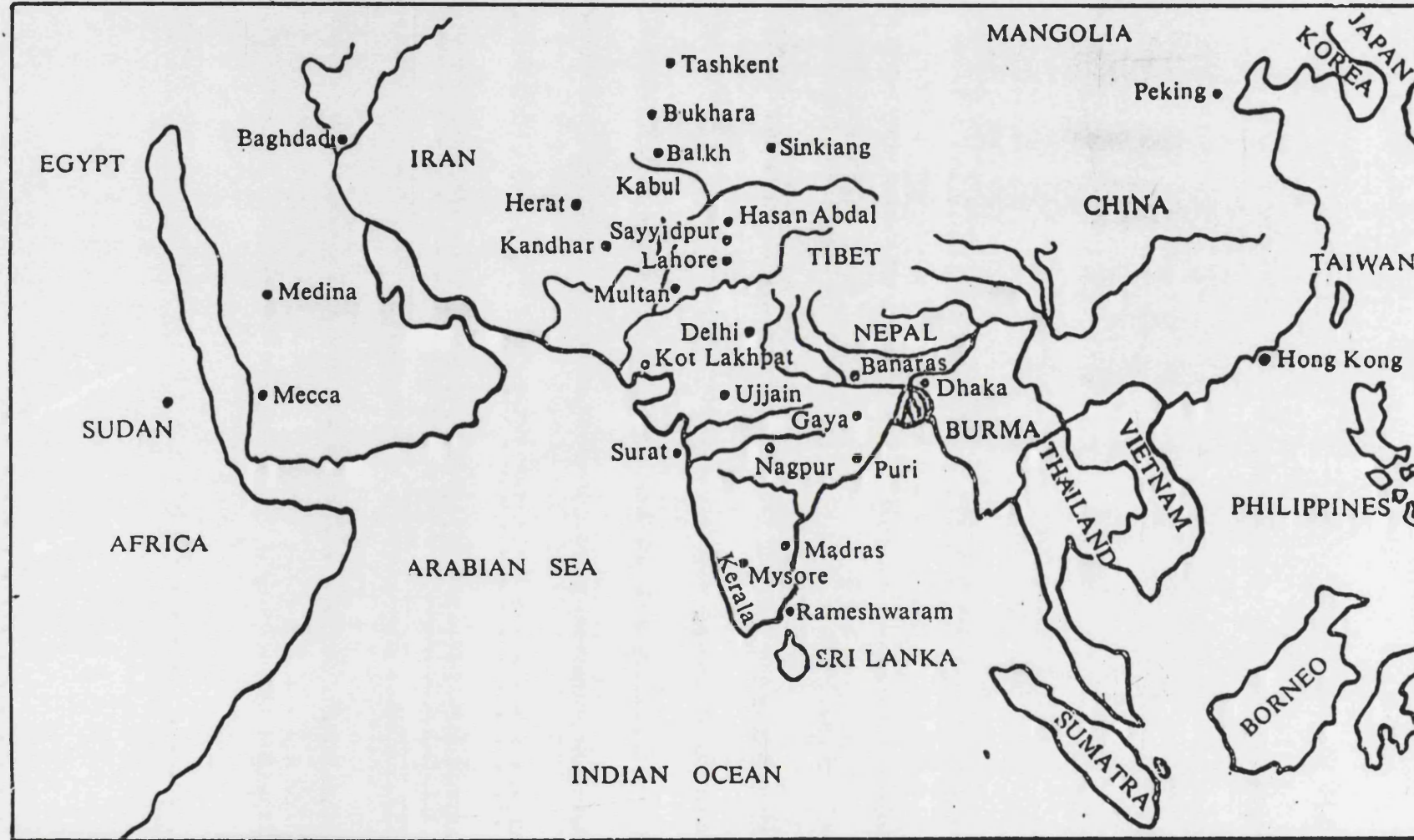
I
Early Sikh Tradition

The Period of the Sikh Gurus (1469-1708)

Sikhism has evolved by a succession of ten masters. Sikh tradition informs us that the ten masters are to be regarded as ten manifestations of the same spirit, rather than a succession of mystics. However, a major influence on the development of Sikhism was the interaction between the Sikhs and the Mughal empire. Babur, the first Mughal emperor ascended the throne during the life-time of the first Sikh master, Guru Nanak. The Mughal power and Sikh religion developed simultaneously, and in close geographical proximity. Thus, the nature and character of Nanak's response must be understood in the context of the prevailing social situation in Punjab during the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries.

Eminent Sikh historian J.S.Grewal (1969) notes that the most significant political development during Nanak's lifetime was the transition from Afghan to Mughal domination in northern India. This he contends had far reaching implications for politics and administration, urban and rural economy and for the prevailing culture and society. During the seventeenth century, North India was afflicted by religious fanaticism and religious persecution by the Mughal emperors of their non-Islamic subjects. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, restored capitation tax or *jizya* on all non-Muslims and imposed the closure of Hindu schools in 1669. J.S.Grewal's examination of the compositions of Guru Nanak reveals that Nanak was familiar with the politico-administrative arrangements and the socio-economic situation prevailing during his time. Therefore, Nanak's denunciation

Map 3

Guru Nanak's Travels

of much of the religious belief and practice of his times led him to envision a new religious ideology which could become the basis of a new social order.

The first spiritual leader, Guru Nanak, was born in 1469 to a high caste Kshatriya Panjabi Hindu family at Talwandi, situated fifty-five miles west of Lahore, now in Pakistan. Nanak's father was a revenue superintendent at Talwandi and Nanak received his education in Sanskrit from the village *pandit* or Brahmin teacher and learnt Persian and Arabic in the village Muslim school. Nanak was married to Sulakhni and had two sons, Sri Chand and Lakshmi Chand. As an educated young man, Nanak thwarted his father's desire for him to become an accountant. Nanak's religious quest or search for a more valuable purpose in life began quite early as a young man working as an employee of an Afghan administrator. During the first quarter of the sixteenth century Nanak undertook extensive journeys and held deliberations and debates with religious emissaries and holy men of different religious faiths. Nanak was interested in all the major forms of contemporary religious belief and practice.

The *janam sakhi* narratives[1] describe an experience of enlightenment at the age of thirty when Nanak is believed to have eloped on the banks of a river and reappeared after three days making a pronouncement: 'There is neither Hindu nor Mussulman and the path which I follow is God's'. After this profound spiritual experience, Nanak undertook the mission to spread the message of God's name to the world. The *janam sakhi* episodes popular among the Sikhs proclaim him as a Guru after this incident and describe him as one who dispels darkness or ignorance (*gu*) and proclaims enlightenment (*ru*).

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[1]*Janam-sakhi* is a hagiographic narrative, especially of the life of Guru Nanak.

The first Sikh master, Guru Nanak, rejected priestly Hinduism and its concomitant rituals and idol worship. He upheld the superiority of moral righteousness over mechanical ritualism. Nanak challenged the authority of Brahmins to communicate divine knowledge and preached the equality of all men. He denounced social differentiation and caste distinctions. Guru Nanak abjured the idolatry of Hinduism and repudiated the veneration of Hindu deities as a means of salvation. He affirmed that none of the Hindu deities could be equated with the Supreme Being because they were in fact the creation of the Supreme Being. He propounded instead the doctrine of strict monotheism. The Supreme Being was formless (*nirankar*) and reveals itself through its creation. Guru Nanak's fundamental teaching was that the path to salvation could be attained through internal religiosity. Salvation could be attained through the remembrance and meditation of the Divine word. The soteriological teaching of the first master, Guru Nanak - *nam simran*, salvation through the remembrance of the divine word, manifested in the holy words of the Sikh Gurus, became the key doctrine of early Sikhism. Fundamental to Nanak's teachings was the role of the guru. The guru was the mediator between ordinary mortals and God and meditation on the guru's word, or *gurbani*, was the highest form of worship. Guru Nanak's emphasis on divine meditation does not imply an appeal for renunciation. On the contrary, Nanak laid emphasis on both the spiritual and the temporal side of human existence. The path of salvation could be pursued while living the life of a householder.

Around 1521, when Guru Nanak was about fifty years old, he settled at Kartarpur with his family. Nanak's emphasis on *gurbani* and away from personal devotion to himself had great significance for the community that he established at Kartarpur. The Kartarpur

community was the beginning of the *sangat*, or 'a religious congregation', where all met as equals, irrespective of caste, status or gender. The centrality of congregational singing of hymns, or *kirtan*, represented a new mode of worship. The Sikh tradition of *guru-ka-langar*, or 'a free community meal' in a *gurudwara* goes back to Guru Nanak, demonstrating the casting down of pollution inhibitions and the equality of all human beings . The followers of Guru Nanak came to be known as Sikhs, from the Sanskrit *shishya* or disciple. Guru Nanak died on 22 September 1539 leaving behind his compositions preserved in 974 hymns.

Guru Nanak was a poet of superb originality and power. Although Nanak was adept at both Sanskrit and Persian - the north Indian languages of the high intelligentsia of his time, he evolved a matchless literary expression for his universal message. The very universality of his message required a form of literary expression which was not far removed from the ecclesiastical and everyday life. The composite idiom Nanak created not only drew upon his extensive travels, but also incorporated a range of available existing linguistic resources - his native Sheikhupuri speech and the existing norms of literary expression. This composite Punjabi-based idiom was adopted in prose by his successors and sustains a sufficient degree of uniformity and consistent linguistic pattern. Christopher Shackle (1983) has termed this scriptural language as "the sacred language of the Sikhs".[1]

Twenty four days before his death in September 1539, Guru Nanak appointed his devout disciple Lehina as his successor. Nanak summoned his followers and blessed Lehina with a book of his hymns (*pothi*) and declared that he possessed his spirit and

[1]See his teaching manual, *An Introduction to the Sacred Language of the Sikhs*, London, SOAS, 1983.

through him God would continue to speak. He bestowed on him the new name of Angad derived from the word *ang*, literally meaning limb, a pun for a part of his own body. Thus before his death Guru Nanak ascertained that guruship was to be conferred on the basis of merit in piety and devotion and not passed on solely on the basis of heredity. Guru Nanak was succeeded by a line of nine masters.[2]

The second Sikh master, Guru Angad (birth 31 March 1504, guruship 1539-52) propagated the fundamental precepts of Nanak's philosophy for thirteen years. He encouraged Guru Nanak's disciple Bala, to compile a *janam-sakhi*, containing a collection of Guru Nanak's hymns. He further instructed the compilation of the Guru's hymns and Bhai Paira Mokha wrote them down and prepared the way for a Sikh scripture.

Guru Amar Das (birth 5 May 1479, guruship 1552-74), perceived the needs of a numerically and geographically expanding constituency. The third guru divided the congregation into twenty-two communities under the direction of heads called *sangatias*. Each division or *manji* referred to the seat of the provincial Sikh leader. The word *manji* stands for bedstead, distinguished from *gaddi* which was occupied solely by the Gurus. Women were also appointed to undertake preaching work and were called *peerahs*. He persuaded the Mughal emperor to abolish the pilgrim tax imposed on pilgrims visiting the

[2]The ten Sikh gurus are: Guru Nanak (1469-1539)
Guru Angad (1504-52)
Guru Amar Das (1479-1574)
Guru Ram Das (1534-81)
Guru Arjan (1563-1606)
Guru Hargobind (1595-1644)
Guru Har Rai (1630-61)
Guru Hari Krishan (1656-64)
Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-75)
Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708)

holy city of Haridwar. He also initiated the tradition of Sikh congregation at the spring and autumn festivals of Baisakhi and Diwali.

Guru Ram Das (birth 24 September 1534, guruship 1574-81), laid the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar, which literally means 'pool of nectar' and designates the sacred pool. The foundation stone was laid by a Muslim mystic, the Sufi, Mian Mir of Lahore. It was Guru Ram Das's successor Guru Arjan (birth 1563, guruship 1581-1606) who built the *gurudwara*, or Sikh temple, and called it Hari Mandir at Amritsar. The Hari Mandir Sahib was designed to possess four doorways, instead of the usual one found in Hindu temples. This was a symbol of the leveling of caste barriers and indicated that Hari Mandir was open to all the four main castes of Hindu society. It was also constructed on a lower platform so that devotees had to step down to enter the temple. This was to remind them that God is attained by humility and bending low in submission.

The prolific and linguistically versatile Guru Arjan compiled the Guru Granth Sahib or Adi Granth, the holy book of the Sikhs and instated it at Hari Mandir Sahib in 1604. A remarkable feature of Guru Granth Sahib is that it contains compositions of several other mystics belonging to diverse cultural and social backgrounds. The strong affinity in the beliefs of these mystics and the Gurus suggests a pan-Indian stance and an attempt to assimilate a growing popular tradition by Guru Arjan (Grewal,J.S. 1990:20). Social and political concerns do not fall outside the scope of the Adi Granth. Social inequality based on caste system and political injustice in the form of oppression by the rulers is explicitly denounced. The fifth Sikh master, Guru Arjan, also conferred Adi Granth with the status of a guru and laid specific and elaborate injunctions concerning the mode of behaviour and

the code of conduct to be observed in the presence of Adi Granth. It is important to note that although many anthologies of devotional literature were compiled in Medieval India, yet historically neither the compilers nor the readers viewed these texts as statements of a distinct religious tradition. Nonetheless, the Adi Granth is the only Sikh scripture to have been entrusted as a substitute guru by the Sikh gurus. No other Sikh scripture has acquired this central position in Sikh religious thought and in Sikh rituals. This is not to deny that the Sikh principle of *nam simran* (meditation of the divine word) enjoins Sikhs to venerate all their holy scriptures.

The Mughal emperor Jehangir was apprehensive of the growing expansion of the Sikh constituency under the powerful influence of Guru Arjan. He ordered the execution of Guru Arjan for his alleged support to his rebellious son Khusrau. Guru Arjan was imprisoned at Lahore and tortured to death on 30 May 1606. Guru Arjan became the first martyr of the Sikhs and his martyrdom was vital in transforming Sikhism into a more militant faith. It was Guru Arjan's son and successor, Guru Hargobind, who proclaimed the structural bonding of religion and politics, which had by then become a historical necessity. He fortified Amritsar and constructed the Akal Takht or the eternal throne, to be a symbol of the temporal power of Sikhism, opposite the Hari Mandir Sahib. The complex of these buildings became known as the Golden Temple or the Darbar Sahib, the pre-eminent Sikh shrine. Guru Hargobind assumed authority of the spiritual and the temporal and gave visible expression to it by carrying two swords, *miri* and *piri*, one designating spiritual authority that he had inherited from his predecessors (*piri*) and the other the temporal side of his authority (*miri*).

Guru Hargobind's significant move to militarize the Sikh faith is explained not only in the context of the Islamisation of the polity under the Mughul emperors but also by the massive influx of Jats into the Sikh tradition by the time of the fifth and sixth Gurus. The origins of the Jats is shrouded in much uncertainty, but the traditions of the Punjab Jats refer to a Rajput descent and emigration to the Punjab from Central India. The Jats are a people accustomed to bearing arms. This indicates that Guru Hargobind's shift in policy was undertaken in the context of an existing tradition of bearing arms among a significant constituency of the Sikhs.

A few words are necessary here about the caste hierarchy among the Sikhs. Before plunging into an overview of caste among Sikhs, let us note those features of the caste system which are often misconstrued. Caste manifests itself concretely only on the local level and in actual practice the caste system is very flexible and diffuse. Although the caste has an economic base and a religious explanation, the isomorphism between the two has not entirely been perfect. At the local level, the economically dominant group, particularly the group that owns the land, is also the highest caste. Therefore, the universal superiority of the Brahman is a fiction that has never really corresponded to the actual workings of the caste system.

Likewise, caste among Sikhs presents an apparent conflict between doctrine and actual practice. The Sikh Gurus explicitly denounced the caste system and proclaimed that caste status was irrelevant for salvation. Although the basic egalitarian principle of Sikhism rejects caste, yet a substantial majority of Sikhs observe certain features of caste in practice. However, caste among Sikhs does not have any doctrinal injunction nor does

it bear any ritual manifestation; it is a cultural construction. Caste is enforced through a local division of labour, the choice of spouse in marriage and the kind of upbringing an offspring would have. The main castes among the Sikhs are - Jat, Khatri, Ramgarhiya (carpenter and ironsmith), Chimba (tailor), Kumhar (potter) and the Sikh scheduled castes - chamar (tanners) and Churah (sweeper). The Jats, being the landed caste, constitute the economically and politically dominant caste group. The Jats are believed to have descended from Scythian tribes who followed the same route as the Aryans, across the Hindu Kush and settled in Punjab. They were brought into the fold of Sikhism during the time of Guru Arjun. They spearheaded early Sikh armies and Sikh Jats became a landowning aristocracy during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Recruitment into the British Army further consolidated their power. The mercantile caste group among Sikhs are the khatris and the Aroras. The Ahluwalias are identified closely with Khatris and Aroras, although they are by origin distillers. An overview of caste among Sikhs presents a complicated situation which becomes even more complex when we notice that most Khatris have dominant Hindu affiliations. The custom of having one son baptized as a Khalsa[3] Sikh, while the other children remain Hindus is widespread among Khatris.

In a bid to stamp out the religious and political threat of Sikhism, Muslim rulers carried out a relentless policy of repression against the Sikhs. In May 1675, a deputation of Brahmins met the ninth Sikh master, Guru Tegh Bahadur (birth 1621, guruship 1664-1675), and beseeched his help to save them from religious persecution by the Mughal governor of the Kashmir valley. Guru Teg Bahadur offered to court martyrdom. On his

[3]Khalsa denotes the religious order or brotherhood instituted by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

refusal to accept Islam, he was beheaded in Chandni Chauk, the central market square near the Red Fort in Delhi on 11 November 1675. Guru Tegh Bahadur's unique sacrifice to uphold the freedom of conscience and protect the Brahmins to whom he was ideologically opposed, assumed great symbolic and ideological significance among the Sikhs.

By the time of the ninth master, the Sikhs possessed several important accouterments of a separate practice. These included a major sacred text - the Adi Granth, a collation of devotional anthology compiled by the fifth master, Guru Arjan in 1603-4, the convention of a communal meal (*langar*), the foundation of religious congregations (*sangat*), setting up of elaborate pilgrim centers. However, it was the initiatives of the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh ((birth 1666, guruship 1675-1708), that endowed a distinctive religious identity to the Sikhs. For it was he who instituted the new Khalsa normative order on the day of the spring festival of Baisakhi in 1699, which distinguished the Khalsa Sikhs from others in Punjabi society. The word Khalsa is derived from the Arabic-Persian word *khalis*, meaning pure. The distinctions were inscribed through a novel form of initiation, *khande di pahul*, which affirmed a new identity through a complex and powerful set of symbols.[4] Those who chose to join the Khalsa brotherhood were to abandon all links with the caste system and worship the one immortal God. The adoption of the common surname of 'Singh' or 'lion' for men and 'Kaur' or 'princess' for women, was aimed at leveling caste distinctions and to instill courage in the faithful.

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[4]Baptised Sikhs were enjoined to wear five symbols or five Ks (each beginning with the character 'k'), comprising *kes* (unshorn hair), *kanga* (wooden comb), *kara* (steel bangle), *kirpan* (sword) and *kachha* (type of breeches).

Ideologically, the institution of the Khalsa was intended to combine spiritual excellence and militant valour of the highest order. Guru Nanak's doctrine of equality was translated by Guru Gobind, into militant defence of the rights of all men. He proclaimed that it was legitimate to draw the sword in the defense of righteousness when all other methods of redress have failed. Historically, it was a response to the perilous situation facing the Sikh community and an attempt to resolve the challenge of external threat as well as internal dissension. The Khalsa brotherhood was founded to weld the Sikhs into a cohesive and homogeneous entity.

The great warrior-hero of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh had lost his father and four minor sons to Mughal tyranny. Before his death, Guru Gobind Singh announced an end to the line of personal gurus. Henceforth, the sacred book of the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib, was to be regarded as the spiritual authority and the temporal aspects of the authority of the Guru were vested in the collective wisdom of the Sikh community, the Khalsa Panth, or community. Thus, the line of human gurus ended in 1708, at the death of the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh.

After Guru Arjan, it was Braj[5] and Persian, the great North Indian literary languages of the later Mughal period that came to dominate Sikh writing. Guru Gobind, was equally at home with Persian although the preferred medium was Braj.[6] Thus, Braj written in Gurmukhi script came to dominate Sikh writings in the eighteenth and early nineteenth Sikh writings. Sanskrit, preserved for 1500 years in the archaic mould

[5]Braj was a Sanskrit variant,advanced by the huge spread of the Krishna cult and it received the occasional patronage of the Agra court as a preferred language for religious poetry.

[6]Some 2,000 hymns composed by Guru Gobind Singh are compiled in the Dasam Granth, or 'book of the tenth master'.

established by Panini, offered privileged access to ontological truth and had served as the language of high intelligentsia until the Islamic invasions. The Muslim conquests resulted in the replacement of Sanskrit by Persian, although its use was restricted for literary and administrative purposes. Here it is useful to bear in mind that during the Mughal period, many regional Indo-Aryan languages, Braj, in particular spread for religious poetry and emerged as a widely used unlocalised language.

Following the death of the last Sikh guru, two doctrines were to guide and provide cohesion to the Sikh community. First was the highly complex doctrine of *guru granth* or scriptural guru. The apotheosis of the Adi Granth, a repository of the mystical utterances of the Sikh gurus, popularly known as *bani*, as an embodiment the figure of a Sikh guru. In other words, the Adi Granth was to serve as a contact between God and ordinary mortals. Second was the relatively simpler doctrine of *guru panth* which ascribed religious authority to the corporate assembly. It proclaimed that God could be found within the *sangat*, or religious congregation, and decisions made by the *sangat* were to represent the will of the guru.[7] The essence of these doctrines was that the Adi Granth, containing the sacred writings of the gurus was the sole successor of the gurus. Salvation could be attained through meditation and ritual incantation of the Sikh scripture, which was endowed with miraculous powers to solve existential dilemmas and was efficacious in overcoming mundane problems. Any person who claimed the status of a living guru was a heretic.

[7]These doctrines are elaborated by J.S.Grewal, 'Legacies of the Sikh Past for the Twentieth Century', in Joseph T.O.'Connell, *et al.*,eds., *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*,Toronto,1988,pp19-20.

The separate Sikh identity was further reinforced through the rahit-nama literature - the new code of conduct manuals which enlisted moral duties and covered all domains of life. The *rahit-namas* laid down specific injunctions for a Sikh way of life based on distinct life-cycle rituals, modes of behaviour, tabooed actions, dietary injunctions, a whole new classificatory code concerning the body and distinct rites of passage to mark birth and death, which defined a unique Khalsa personhood. By the time of the last of the Sikh gurus, the Sikhs possessed a distinct set of religious doctrines and practices. J.D.Cunningham, who was the first to document the Sikh population following the British rule in Punjab, writes on the distinct cultural and religious tradition of the Sikhs:

> So Nanak [the first Guru] disengaged his little society of worshippers from Hindu idolatry and Muslim superstition and placed them on a broad basis of religious and moral purity; Amar Das [the third Guru] preserved the infant community from declining into a set of asceticists; Arjun [the fifth Guru] gave his increasing followers a written rule of conduct and a civil organisation. Hargobind [the sixth Guru] adds the use of arms and a military system and Gobind Singh [the tenth Guru] bestowed upon them a distinct political existence and inspire them with the desire of being socially free and nationally independent (Cunningham,J.D. 1849:80).

To recapitulate thus far: we have attempted to situate the metamorphosis of the pacifist followers of Guru Nanak to the militant brotherhood of the Khalsa within the context of the historical and social development of Sikh religion. In this process, we noted the contribution of each Sikh Guru in consolidating the doctrinal discourse of Sikhism. We also delineated the key additions of a distinct and separate practice that characterised early Sikh tradition. Whether the Sikh gurus intended to create an independent faith is a subject of theological debate and lies outside the scope of this study.

The Political Triumph of the Sikh Movement

Post-Guru period upto British Annexation of Punjab (1708-1849)

The dramatic political triumph of the Sikh movement in the second half of the eighteenth century and the establishment of the vast Sikh empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh between 1799 and 1839, must be viewed in the wider context of the historical decline of the Mughal empire and the rise of successor states in the eighteenth century in India. The eighteenth century witnessed the political emergence and consolidation of Khalsa principalities. The Khalsa Sikhs attempted to establish their power by regrouping into political units called *misls*. By the mid-eighteenth century there were a total of twelve Sikh *misls*.[8] Each *misl* was an independent confederacy, although they acted in unison when faced with a common danger. It was the khalsa principle of *guru-panth* that provided cohesion for their political struggle and welded them when faced with internal dissension.

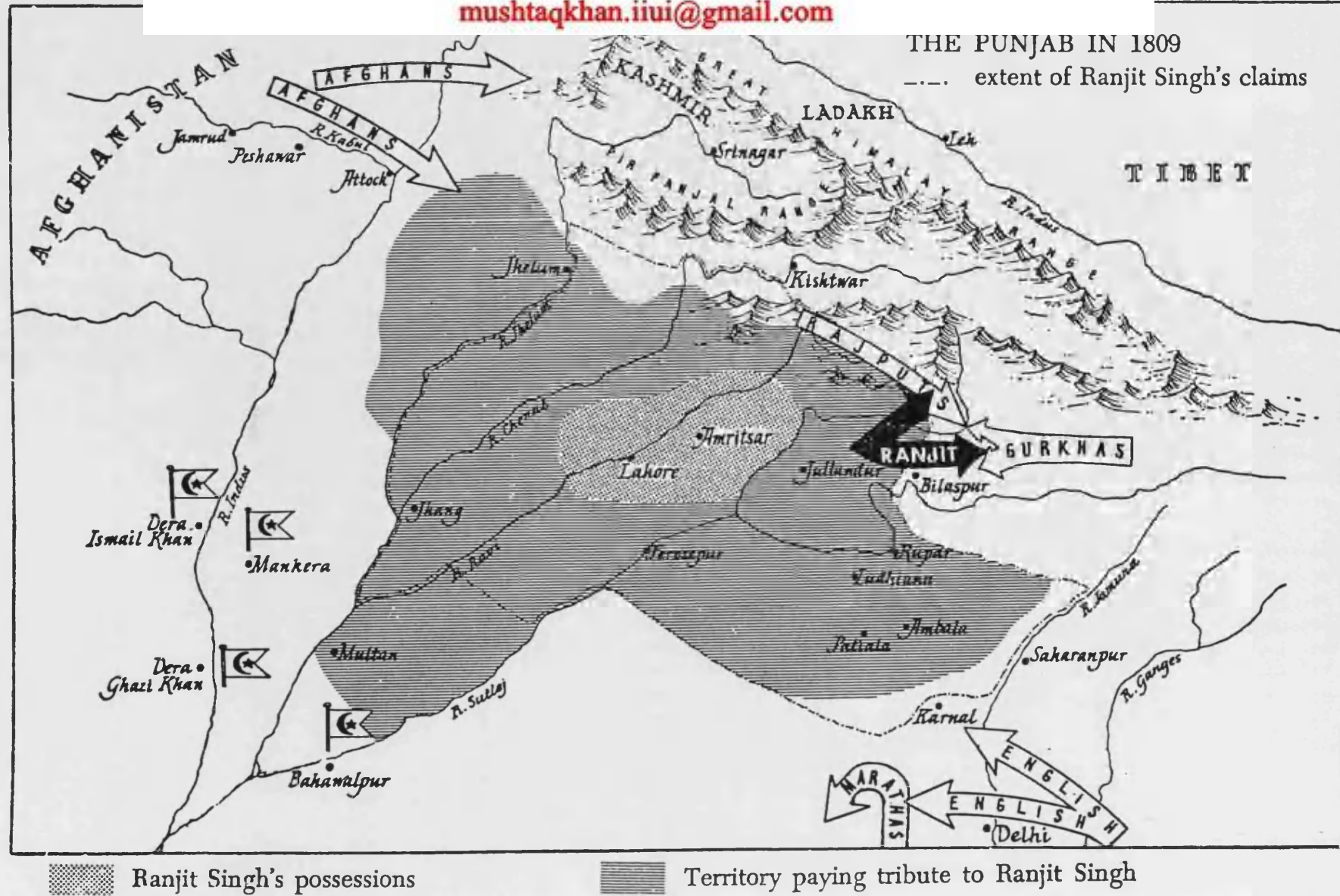
The leading representatives of each *misl* gathered twice annually on the festivals of Baisakhi and Holi, which correspond with the agrarian cycle of harvest and spring in the Sikh religious calendar. These occasions had been customarily marked by festivities at the two pre-eminent Sikh sacred centers, Anandpur Sahib and Amritsar, right from the period of the gurus. Sikhs assembled on the occasions of these bilingual meetings to discuss dilemmas facing the Sikh Panth and deliberate collective action to resolve these problems. The resolutions passed by these gatherings were called *gurmattas*, literally meaning resolutions endorsed by the guru. The holy site and the presence of the Adi Granth endowed a sacred character to the *gourmets*. These proceedings were regarded as those of

[8]The Arabic word *misl* stands for 'alike' and designates the spirit of equality that characterised the Sikh *misls*. These *misls* were Ahluwalia, Bhangi, Dulewalia, Kanheya, Krora Singhia, Nakkai, Nishania, Phoolkia, Ramghariya, Shahid, Singhpuria and Sukarchakia.

the *sarbat-khalsa* or corporate body of the Khalsa. The biannual convergence of Sikh pilgrims at Amritsar on the festivals of Baisakhi and Diwali instilled in them a corporate spirit. Moreover, it was on these occasions that the Sikh chieftains would co-ordinate the deployment of the Dal Khalsa, or the Khalsa army, when faced with serious political turmoil.

It is curious that the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh seems to have dropped out of view in conventional Sikh histories and the element of inter-communal relations during this period has been attenuated to the point of caricature. Nonetheless, the striking feature that determined the policies adopted by Maharaja Ranjit Singh was that at least 80 per cent of the population of the territory he ruled was Muslim, 10 per cent were Hindus and the remaining 10 per cent were Sikhs. It is astonishing that even in the palmiest days of the Khalsa, Sikhs comprised only a small proportion of the total population of Punjab.

Consequently, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's policies were directed to building up a core of support among all religious communities. Therefore, state patronage was extended equally to Punjabi Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Many of his broad measures such as a ban on cow slaughter throughout his domains, celebration of Muslim festivals and an order to desist from public calling to prayers in the Sikh holy city of Amritsar emphasise the point that all religious communities enjoyed considerable patronage and power. However, Maharaja Ranjit Singh ruled under the name of the Khalsa, issuing coins in the name of its central council of chieftains, the *Gurumatta*. Also, the title of Maharaja was conferred on Ranjit Singh by the Khalsa Panth. But at the same time he was careful to have Muslim learned men present in the court when he assumed the royal title, which implicitly rejected

Ranjit Singh's possessions — Territory paying tribute to Ranjit Singh

the Mughal's authority in 1801. He fulfilled all the necessary criteria, so that Punjab could remain a land in which Islam could be publicly practiced. He secured tributes from Muslim holy men and from those who recognised his legitimacy. At the same time, Maharajah Ranjit Singh made generous endowments to *gurudwaras* and built the upper floors of the Akal Takht. He lavishly designed and decorated the Darbar Sahib transforming it into the 'Golden Temple'. Under the patronage of the monarch, Amritsar became a flourishing trade center.

The symbolic memory of Sikh rule is infused by images of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule as that of a truly secular sovereign. Given the bitter memories of religious persecution during the Mughul period, the Sikh monarch did not seek revenge against the Muslims. The Maharaja is believed to have once told his foreign minister, "God intended that I look upon all religions with one eye; that is why I was deprived of the other eye". The monarch's accommodating attitude was reflected in the heterogeneous power structure. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Prime Minister was Dhian Singh, a Hindu, while his Finance Minister was Dina Nath, a Hindu Brahmin, his artillery commander was Mian Ghausa, a Muslim, who was given the title of 'Commander and Faithful Friend'. The noted Sikh commanders of his army were Hari Singh Nalwa, Phoola Singh Akali and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia. His army formed the backbone of his empire and he promoted the unique reorganisation of his armed forces along European lines by inviting French, Italian, German and Greek officers to train his army. His formidable empire was the largest segment that remained beyond colonial control. The language of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court was Persian, the North Indian

language of the high intelligentsia. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had a passion for fine jewels and was the owner of the famous diamond Koh-i-Noor, or 'the mountain of light'.

Thus far we seem to have given a somewhat embellished picture of the growth and consolidation of Sikh identity in pre-colonial Punjab. The nineteenth century, a much vaunted period of religious revival and purification, displays quite contradictory features in religious practice. For this reason it is important to consider some of the striking features of religious conflict scattered throughout the record of this period and put them into some sort of interpretative framework.

II
Socio-religious Reform Movements and the Growth of Communal Consciousness in British Punjab

The Colonial Period (1849-1947)

The most striking feature of nineteenth century Punjab is the degree to which religion on the one hand, and language on the other, came to determine social and political identities. The perfect isomorphism between linguistic and religious identities that exists in contemporary South Asia, has its historical antecedents in the social and political upheaval that took place in the nineteenth century in Punjab. This section will focus on examining these profound historical developments.

The Historical Context

Sikh political power collapsed on 29 March,1849, when Punjab was annexed by the British following two sanguinary Anglo-Sikh wars.[1] After centuries of Hindu rule, followed by over five hundred years of Islamic dominance and half a century of Sikh

[1]Following the annexation of Punjab, the last Sikh monarch, Maharaja Dalip Singh, was removed from the province and the formidable Khalsa army disbanded.

rule, the compact geographical area which constituted British Punjab was a region of cultural and religious diversity unsurpassed in the entire subcontinent. The Punjab was historically the meeting point of three major world religions - Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism, and the coexistence of three languages - Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, each with its distinct script.

However, the population of British Punjab was distributed in such a manner that it did not allow numerical domination by a single community. Muslims were found in a majority in the west, Hindus to the east and Sikhs were most prevalent in the center, while a close balance existed with the number of Hindus and Sikhs roughly equaling the number of Muslims. Another unique feature of British Punjab, noted by Kenneth W. Jones (1968) was its lack of a single dominant social system. Whereas the rest of the subcontinent was characterised by the dominant Hindu social system, British Punjab was characterised by the existence of three separate but interconnected social systems, one in each religious community. Therefore, in approaching the subject of the growth of communal consciousness in British Punjab, we confront a situation of unusual complexity and a richness of phenomena which simultaneously intrigues and perplexes.

The Missionary, the Print Media and the Creation of New Spheres

The Christian missionaries advanced forward with each new British annexation. Soon after the annexation of Punjab on 29 March 1849, mission stations were opened in the provincial capital, Lahore The first Christian mission station beyond Delhi was established in Punjab at Ludhiana in 1834. By the 1880s a network of mission establishments covered virtually the entire Punjab province. In order to expand their

base, the Christian missionaries introduced new methods of communication. The first printing press was set up at the Ludhiana mission in 1835. The introduction of the printing press generated tracts, pamphlets and religious newspapers in vernacular languages, such as Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Persian with enormous speed.[2] The Ludhiana Mission Press was the proud owner of the only Gurmukhi typefaces in India for several years.

Besides founding the printing press, an extensive network of mission schools were established. The content of the school curriculum was soaked in crypto-Christian ideas and Bible classes were included in the curriculum. C.A.Bayly notes that, 'Some of the earliest Bengali and Hindi printed history books for schools contain accounts of the Jewish people and the Christian Church'.[3]The education imparted first at mission and then at state schools combined a knowledge of Western subjects with instruction in English and the vernacular and the term 'anglo-vernacular education' designates this hybrid educational system. Moreover, the British conquest of Punjab had generated an urgent need for English educated Indians to staff government offices and mid-nineteenth century witnessed a rapid increase of state bureaucracies. The education imparted at mission schools was a prerequisite for coveted government jobs. The aim of the colonial educational policy was to produce a carefully calibrated quantum of

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[2]The term 'vernacular' stands for a modern Indian language, in contrast to classical or ritual languages such as Sanskrit or Arabic, or to a modern imperial language like English. Although the use of the term 'vernacular' implies a spoken dialect rather than a literary language, the modern North Indian languages - Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi that we examine in our study are languages of considerable range and subtlety. With the advent of the printing press, these languages became the medium of written communication among the literate sections of the population.

[3]C.A Bayly, 'Returning the British to South Asian History: The Limits of Colonial Hegemony', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, New Series, Vol.XVII,no.2,December 1994,p.6.

English educated Indians to serve as a politically reliable, grateful and acculturated indigenous elite, filling the subordinate echelons of the colony's bureaucracy and larger commercial enterprises.

In their drive to gain converts the missionaries also instituted orphanages, medical missions, and introduced the *zenana* mission designed to reach women in the privacy of homes. Not only did the missionaries conduct their proselytizing activities through the introduction of Western institutions, they also transmitted their message through indigenous channels of communication, such as *shastrarths* (a form of traditional religious debate), and took to preaching the gospel publicly in the streets, bazaars and village fairs.

The activities of the Christian missionaries were backed and supported by the colonial state. The number of Christian converts rose rapidly from 3,912 in 1881 to over 19,000 a decade later, an increase of 410 per cent.[4] The rise in Christian converts was perhaps not as alarming as the success of modern communication methods and the formidable alliance between the Christian Church and the British administrators. A constellation of ideas developed around the notion of surreptitious conversion and was very significant in sparking a series of reform-revival movements in Punjab.

Punjab was rife with religious reform movements in the nineteenth century. A comprehensive description of the long social history of these movements lies outside the scope of this study. Our focus will be on examining how these religious reform movements yielded conflict between members of India's major religions. This theme

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[4]Kenneth W.Jones, *Socio-religious reform movements in British India*, The New Cambridge History of India III.1, Cambridge University Press, 1989,p.87.

has generated considerable scholarly interest and the following analysis draws on the perspective developed by Kenneth W. Jones, eminent historian of South Asia. Kenneth W. Jones (1976,1989) pioneering study of the growth of communal consciousness in British Punjab provides valuable insights into the history and development of nineteenth century reform movements.

The Arya Samaj Movement

The Arya Samaj movement was the foremost Hindu reform movement in the nineteenth century in North India. The Arya Samaj movement represented the response on the part of the newly anglicized Hindu community to reformulate a modernized Hindu religious tradition. It also represented the first modern efforts to link Hindu religious values to modern life. Although this movement was not overtly political, it later formed the basis for the development of radical Hindu political parties, such as the RSS, and the BJP.

The ideology of the Arya Samaj was enunciated by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), a Brahmin from central Kathiawar in western India. Swami Dayanand, a peripatetic ascetic, proclaimed a 'purified' form of traditional Hinduism and insisted on the infallibility of the Vedas. He proclaimed that the only true Hinduism was to be found in the Vedas. He envisioned a purified Hinduism free of contemporary Hindu practices - polytheism, idolatry, child marriage, the role of Brahmin priests and ban on widow marriage. These principles were not in conflict with Sikh tradition and many Sikhs participated in the Arya Samaj campaigns in the formative years. In order to disseminate his message of a revived Hindu tradition, Dayanand Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj, or 'Aryan Society' at Rajkot, in the western state of Gujarat. In 1875,

Dayanand published his major polemical work, the *Satyarth Prakash*, or 'the light of truth', in which he elaborated the concept of true Hinduism.

It was in Punjab that Dayanand Saraswati's vision evoked an enthusiastic response. Dayanand Saraswati's fifteen month sojourn of Punjab in 1877 had lasting effects on Punjabi society. The Lahore Arya Samaj was instituted in 1877. Within a month of its foundation, its membership shot up by 300 per cent. By the time Dayanand completed his tour of Punjab in July 1878, he had founded eleven Samajs.

Following his death in 1883, his followers drafted plans to honour their departed teacher by setting up modern institutions which would impart and propagate Arya tenets and counter the challenge posed by Christian missionaries. This resulted in the founding of the first centralizing organization within the Samaj - the Dayananda Anglo-Vedic Trust and Management Society. The first meeting of the Dayananda Anglo-Vedic Trust and Management Society was held on 27 February 1886 and led to the institution of the first Arya school on 1 June 1886. The educational activities of the Samajis received a boost on 18 May 1889, when the Punjab University granted affiliation to the new Dayananda Anglo-Vedic College. The Dayananda Anglo-Vedic High School and College received no support from the government and no participation of Englishmen on the faculty. These schools and colleges were highly successful as demonstrated by the results of the students in the annual examinations. The success of these educational institutions stimulated discussions to impart education to women. By the early 1890s a girls school, the Arya Kanya Pathshala, was established at Jullunder and on 14 June 1896, Kanya Mahavidyalaya, a womens college, the very first of its kind was established at Jullunder. Thus, the spectacular

success of the Dayananda Anglo-Vedic educational movement, which began in 1883, led to the establishment of educational institutions throughout North India. In addition, the Vedic Magazine was founded in 1877 and became a powerful channel to launch bitter attacks on other faiths. In 1877, the first Arya Samaj orphanage was opened in Ferozepur. The Arya Samaj promoted the use of Hindi as a medium of education.

The primary thrust of the militant Aryas was on proselytization and *Ved Prachar*, or 'preaching of the Vedas'. Although traditionally Hinduism lacks a conversion ritual, plans were made to hire professional missionaries to preach Arya tenets. A stream of tracts, pamphlets and newspapers were printed in English as well as the vernaculars to supply the Samaj missionaries with a wide variety of literature. In November 1895, six full-time paid professional preachers were hired to preach and work with the local Arya Samaj branches. The entire province was divided into circles, or *mandalis*. Mindful of the success of Christian missionaries in converting the lower castes, militant Aryas developed their own ritual of conversion, *shuddhi*. The Arya Samaj activists employed *shuddhi* to reconvert any Muslim or Christian whose ancestors were alleged to have been Hindus and to purify the untouchable Sikh and Hindu castes. In 1900, the Arya Samaj activists reconverted some outcaste Rehatia Sikhs through a similar ceremony. The Sikh community was outraged by the ceremony and protest meetings were held to denounce efforts by Hindu religious reformers to bring Sikhs back into the Hindu fold.

The proselytism of the Arya Samaj activists and the Arya Samaj message of an aggressive Vedic Hinduism intensified religious conflict. Writings of several Arya Samajis repeatedly attacked other faiths and arguments were developed to destroy the

credibility of other religions. The goal repeatedly articulated was one of defeating all opponents and, in the process, of establishing the superiority of Vedic Hinduism. The Samjis did not talk of ethical equivalence or of all religions being true. Dayananda's extensive critique of Christianity elaborated in chapter 13 of *Satyarth Prakash*, laid the foundation for anti-Christian writings and later became the source for Arya criticism of Christianity.[5] The most dramatic instance was the writings of a militant Arya Samaji, Pandit Lekh Ram (1858-97) and his portrayal of Islam as a religion of slavery, murder and bigotry. This infuriated the Muslim population and led to the assassination of Pandit Lekh Ram. The three main targets of the Arya Samaj were the *kernanis* or 'Christians', *kuranis* or 'Muslims' and *puranis* or 'orthodox Hindus'.

In addition, there was considerable anti-Sikh propaganda throughout the late 1880s. In 1888, the Arya 'fire-brands' mounted an attack on the Sikh faith. Arya critique of Sikhism was elaborated in a lengthy article entitled "Sikhism Past and Present". This article ridiculed the infallibility of Guru Nanak and Sikhism was presented as a degenerate and decadent religion. Public attack and criticism of Sikhism by Arya protagonists during its Lahore anniversary celebration on 25 November 1888, resulted in immediate loss of Sikh support for the Arya Samaj, whereas earlier, young reformist Sikhs had collaborated with Arya activists so as to stem the tide of Christian missionary success. A sense of shared goals and similar ideological commitment had formed the basis of the alliance between the Arya Samaj and the Sikh reformers.

[5]For an examination of the logic and the critical techniques employed by Dayananda Saraswati to discredit all claims of Christian superiority, see Kenneth W.Jones,'Swami Dayananda Saraswati's Critique of Christianity' in Kenneth W.Jones (ed.), *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages*, Albany, N.Y.,1992,pp.52-74.

Sustained attacks on Sikhism appeared in the Arya press throughout 1887 and 1888, which further embittered relations between Aryas and Sikhs. Thus, developments within the Arya Samaj, the rising radicalism of the Samaj, the insistence on the unique and superior qualities of Hinduism and its expanding organizational strength intensified existing communal cleavages.

The Arya Samaj movement appealed particularly to the newly educated segments of the Hindu population. The Arya Samaj movement derived its force from its ability to appropriate and invert Christian doctrines and to use the Christian media and aggressive proselytising against them. Consequently, the Arya Samaj instituted modern institutional forms in order to successfully propagate Arya tenets. Broadly speaking, one of the critical changes to come about during this period was the conception of a novel version of a public, all-India Hinduism under attack from Western interference. Commenting on this critical change, C.A.Bayly writes, 'Whereas, in the past, *dharma* (piety), had always been qualified by a region or type - for instance, Raj Dharma, or Maharashtra Dharma - the Dharma Sabha became a generalised public arena for a Hindu nation, opposed both to the unreformed brahmanical hierarchy and the foreign *mlecchas*'.[6]

The Singh Sabha Movement (1870 - 1919)

Young educated Sikhs found themselves caught up in a similar historical process as their Hindu counterparts. Having become disillusioned with the Arya Samaj by the late 1880s, they sought to reevaluate Sikh identity. Although different groups within the

[6]C.A Bayly, 'Returning the British to South Asian History: The Limits of Colonial Hegemony', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, New Series, Vol.XVII,no.2,December 1994,p.8.

Sikh community sought to redefine Sikh identity, our attention will focus on the activities of the most powerful of Sikh reformers - the Singh Sabha ideologues. The Singh Sabha social reform movement marked a new phase in the evolution of modern Sikhism.

Attempts to come to terms with the cultural forces unleashed by the British Raj resulted in the setting up of numerous voluntary bodies and socio-religious associations in Punjab. Chief among these were the Anjuman-i-Punjab, or 'the society for the diffusion of useful knowledge', founded in 1865, with the backing of the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, Donald McLeod and the Brahmo Samaj, set up at Lahore during 1862-3 by Navina Chandra Rai, an accountant with the North-Western Railway. The activities of these native bodies received incessant interest from the Sikh gentry. The Brahmo Samaj received wide patronage and endowments from Dyal Singh Majithia (1849-98), a Jat Sikh aristocrat, who founded *The Tribune*, a 12-page English weekly paper brought out on 2 February 1881. *The Tribune* became a powerful channel for broadcasting Brahmo ideology in Punjab. Likewise, many prominent Sikhs lobbied in forums organised by these associations.

Participation in the activities of the Anjuman and the Brahmo Samaj spurred the Sikh leaders to launch new initiatives. This heralded the formation of Sri Guru Singh Sabha at Amritsar in 1873. The leadership of the early Sikh reform movement, referred to as the Singh Sabha or Tat Khalsa movement comprised the Sikh princes, the landed gentry and the traditional intellectuals. It became a forum for convassing public opinion on such social issues as mass education, reform of social customs, changes in customary behaviour such as female infanticide, widow remarriage, rights

for women, development of the economy and wider theological issues. Hailing from the established social classes, these leaders had been loyal to the British authorities and were poorly equipped to confront the rapidly changing cultural milieu. Following the expansion of British administration during the first two decades of this century, influential new figures entered the political arena and were to play a vital role. This embryonic class of young Sikhs outflanked the landed Sikh gentry, many of whom looked down upon the parvenus. Thus, the role of articulating the flux in social attitudes was assumed by the newly educated, bilingual, young Sikhs. Hence there came about a split between the Sikh landed élite and the commercial classes which had very significant political consequences.

The functionaries of the Lahore Sabha were committed to the mechanics of print culture. This period saw a flurry of activity resulting in the founding of the Khalsa Press in 1883. Two more newspapers, the *Khalsa Gazette*, an Urdu weekly and *Khalsa Akhbar*, a Punjabi weekly, were founded in 1884 and in 1886 respectively. However, in comparison to the Hindu press, Sikh journalism remained sporadic and varied in its appeal.[7]

In 1879, another Singh Sabha was set up in Lahore and by 1899 some 121 Singh Sabhas were operative.[8] The rapid expansion in the number of Singh Sabhas necessitated the formation of a central organization to coordinate their activities. In 1902, Chief Khalsa Diwan was instituted and Sunder Singh Majithia (1872-1941), a

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[7]Paul Brass has provided a comparison of census records on books and periodicals published in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi in pre-independence Punjab. He observes that Gurmukhi press was perhaps the slowest to develop. See Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*,Cambridge University Press,1974,p.308.

[8]Rajiv A.Kapoor, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1986, p.17.

prominent member of the Sikh landed gentry became the first secretary of the Diwan. One of the factors that contributed to the ascendancy of the Lahore Singh Sabha (1879) was the patronage it received from the British. In 1881, Sir Robert Egerton, the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, accepted the office of patron of the Lahore Singh Sabha, which enhanced its position considerably.

The interest of the Singh Sabha to establish modern-style educational institutions led to the foundation of the Khalsa College at Amritsar in 1892. The Khalsa College became a premier Sikh educational institution providing knowledge of western science and literature, along with imparting *gurmat*, or 'Sikh religious education'. Soon branches of Khalsa Colleges and Khalsa Schools were established all over Punjab. This affirmed a growing acceptance of the moral importance of Western knowledge. Thus, Western-style education became more acceptable not only because it provided cadres for governmental and corporate hierarchies, but also because it was believed to be morally significant. Moreover, the aim was to create an Anglo-vernacular education which placed emphasis on Punjabi language instruction, with English taught as a second language. The movement for the establishment of a Sikh college received enthusiastic support from the government. Endowments were received from the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army and Sir James Lyall, the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab. Sikh leaders expressed their gratitude by naming the college, Lyall Khalsa College, in honour of the Lieutenant-Governor of the province.

As foes the Sikhs had made worthy enemies and had won the ungrudging admiration of the British. Commenting on the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848-9),

General Thackwell, a British commander observed: 'Seikhs caught hold of the bayonets of their assailants with their left hands and closing with their adversaries, dealt furious sword blows with their right... This circumstance alone will suffice to demonstrate the rare species of courage possessed by these men'.[9] A similar declaration, that 'Sikhs were the finest martial races in the subcontinent' by S.S.Thorburn (1844-1924), a British civilian, underlined the attitude of a considerable number of British officials. Admiration for Sikh valour, turned to gratitude for their loyalty in the Indian mutiny of 1857. Sikhs had come foremost to the defense of the Raj during the mutiny. As an outcome of the Sikh loyalty during the mutiny, recruitment in the army was opened to the Sikhs. The outbreak of the First World War further marshalled the resources of the Punjab province and Sikh loyalty was once again expressed during the war. Of the twenty two military crosses awarded for gallantry to Indians, fourteen were received by the Sikh soldiers.[10] Consequently, the Sikhs were recipients of considerable official patronage. English publishing companies took a keen interest in the Sikhs during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the 31 years following the beginning of the Singh Sabha movement in 1873, a large number of books were published emphasising the Sikh martial tradition and their loyalty to the British crown.[11]

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[9]Rajiv A.Kapoor, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*,p.10; cf.E.J.Thackwell, *Narrative of the Second Sikh War,1848-1849*,London,1851, p.213.

[10]Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*,vol.2, Oxford University Press, reprinted in 1989, p.160.

[11]Sir Charles Gough and Arthur D.Innes, *The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars*, London,1897,pp. 43,78,79,102 and 109; Lepel Griffin, *Ranjit Singh*, Oxford,1892,pp. 17,18,34-7; Sir John J.N.Gordon, *The Sikhs*, London,1904,pp. vi,3,152,153,175,179,182,219-23; cf. the introduction by Himadari Banerjee to S.S.Thorburn, *The Punjab in Peace and War*, Delhi, second ed., first published in 1904,p.vi.

The Ideological Issues

Before we examine the key ideological issues concerning the Singh Sabha movement, let us note that there was diversity of opinion on specific issues among Sikh reformers and fluctuating variety of expression associated with the Lahore Sabha and later the Chief Khalsa Diwan. However, the major thrust was on internal issues. The growing concern was about clear demarcation of Sikh communal boundaries and the defense of Sikh religion from attacks by other religions.

By the late 1880s the question of Sikh identity became a controversial legal and public issue. In 1877, the first partial English translation of the Adi Granth was published. The translator was a controversial German philologist and missionary, Dr. Ernest Trumpp. This translation was rebutted by the Sikh leadership on the ground that Trumpp had repeatedly made disparaging remarks about their religious tradition. The Sikh leadership was dismayed by Trumpp's claim that he could explain the contents of the Adi Granth better than any Sikh intellectual and that the Sikhs did not know the contents of the Adi Granth. The controversy generated by this issue evoked considerable interest in the interpretation of Sikh scriptures and tradition.

In 1898, the question of Sikh identity became a legal issue. The widow of Dyal Singh Majithia, a Sikh aristocrat and philanthropist, contested his will on the plea that the Hindu law of inheritance under which her husband had bequeathed his fortune to a trust did not apply, as he was a Sikh and not a Hindu. The Punjab High Court was left to determine whether Sikhs were or were not Hindus. To the dismay of the Sikh community, the court ruled that Dyal Singh Majithia was, infact, a Hindu. This sparked controversy in public meetings and in the press over the issue of Sikh identity.

Earlier in 1853, the conspicuous conversion to Christianity by Maharaja Dalip Singh, the last Sikh monarch, had outraged the Sikh public already.

The issue of Sikh identity was further sharpened by vociferous Arya Samaj attacks on Sikh faith. In 1899, two widely circulated pamphlets entitled *Sikh Hindu Hain*, or 'Sikhs are Hindus' claimed that Sikhism was a reformist strain within Hinduism. It was in response, that Bhai Kahn Singh published his classic tract, *Ham Hindu Nahin*, or 'We are not Hindus', which laid the basis of a distinct Sikh identity. Thereafter, Arya Samaj polemicists engaged in sustained attacks on Sikh religion and attempts were made to incorporate it within the Hindu fold.

The 1880s Sikh reform movement was opposed to the 'inclusivistic' tendencies of the Hindu movement. Scholars of Sikh religion unanimously accept that Sikhism has historically evolved as an 'exclusive' religion. The Sikh gurus established specific rules of conduct, prescribed rules of membership, preached adherence to specific dogmas and purged the heterodox in the Sikh tradition. This partly explains why the 1880s Sikh reform movement was 'exclusive', in contrast to the 'heterodox' and reformist Hindu Arya Samaj movement of the 1880s, which sought to incorporate other religions. It was precisely this logic of Hindu inclusive tolerance that induced a section of the Sahajdhari[12] Sikh leadership to declare that they were Hindus, and to support a resolution at a large public meeting to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee at Lahore in 1897 that Sikhs were part of the Hindu community.

[12]Sehajdhari, or the slow adopters, refers to those Sikhs who do not observe the unshorn hair of the Khalsa nor accept the Khalsa normative order instituted by the last Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Historically,their numbers have dwindled over the centuries.

Let us now consider how far the Sikh reform movement succeeded in establishing a new episteme. The central theme of Harjot Oberoi's book, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (1994) is an examination of the processes of construction and transformation of religious identities among the Sikhs during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Harjot Oberoi seeks to question the use of universal, monolithic religious categories such as 'Hindus', 'Sikhs' and 'Muslims' by examining the pluralism of religious traditions which, he contends, was a distinct central feature of early Indian religion. Against this he maintains that the history of early Sikh tradition, firmly rooted in the diversity of Indic culture, was in fact marked by the absence of a concern for demarcating religious boundaries, which remained fluid and ambiguous. Only later, with the social and political changes generated by the British Raj, was a systematic discourse of Sikhism established.

Harjot Oberoi's book is a classic example of what may be termed the 'hegemony' approach to the study of religious reform in colonial India. The 'hegemony' approach to the study of religious reform in colonial India seeks to explain how the rising middle class, empowered by its position in modern capitalism, used religious reform to gain cultural hegemony by gaining control over sacred centers and by defining a uniform, undifferentiated religious discourse with discrete boundaries. The hegemony approach maintains that the urbanized, semi-English educated middle class attempted to reform their religion by purging it of superstition, irrational and magical beliefs and condemning folk practices such as the veneration of local saints and sorcery. This response was partly to save the indigenous religion from attacks by

Christian missionaries, who believed that the present decadence of Indian civilization was due to the belief in superstitions and polytheism.

This view holds that in pre-colonial India, the boundaries that marked the beliefs and practices of Indian religion were open, allowing room for local practices. Participation of different religious communities in the worship of local saints is interpreted as a sign of inbuilt tolerance. But, what did this mean to the different religious communities involved in these shared practices? What was the nature of their interaction with each other? What were the constraints on this interaction? These questions are persistently left out of examination.

Harjot Oberoi maintains that the Tat Khalsa leadership comprised a new class which established a new discourse of modern Sikhism. This new class needed a meaningful, standard cultural idiom to universalize its aspirations. They articulated and disseminated the discourse of modern Sikhism by generating new texts, selecting symbols, ceremonies and customs. Through a series of innovations the Tat Khalsa provided the Sikhs with a distinct and separate Sikh identity by endowing them with a standard history, text, ritual calendar, life cycle rituals, sacred space and festivities. The process involved the selection of specific traditions, beliefs and practices which provided key features to the formulation of a codified, corporate Sikh identity. According to Oberoi the new doctrine of monotheism and scripturalism constituted 'a gross transgression of Sikh doctrine'.[13]The new doctrine established a fundamental change in the definition of a Sikh and the new discourse was universalistic, positivist,

[13]Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 1994,p.323.

rational and heavily imprinted with a Protestant-style ethic. Thus, in the course of the nineteenth century, a profound and irreversible transition from an earlier pluralist Sikh tradition into a highly uniform Sikh identity took place. The Sikhs began to see themselves as a separate, undifferentiated religious community.

But the approach adopted by Oberoi provides only a partial understanding of the historical process of identity formation. This view is based on the contention that the Singh Sabha reformers enunciated a fundamentally new Sikh doctrine which dramatically transformed the Sikh identity. Harjot Oberoi argues that in order to establish a separate Sikh identity, the Khalsa Sikhs formulated 'their own code of conduct, a novel form of initiation and some new rites of passage'.[14] What was so novel and profound about this message remains unexplained in Oberoi's book and contradicts his earlier observations. For instance, he argues, 'But in the eighteenth century the Khalsa Sikhs became keenly aware of the absence of distinct life-cycle rituals and took urgent steps to rectify the situation by introducing new rites, particularly to mark birth, initiation and death'.[15] This is in stark contrast to his later claim, 'Similarly, in the area of life-cycle rituals, Sikhs had not as yet formulated distinctive marriage and mortuary rituals'.[16] On the one hand, he argues that the Khalsa Sikhs had established their distinctive rites de passage, initiation ritual and rites to mark birth and death by the eighteenth century. On the other hand, he claims that a novel form of initiation, and exclusive Khalsa life cycle rituals were constituted by the Tat Khalsa reformers only during the nineteenth century. It is evident that there was

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[14]Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*,p.89.
[15]Ibid.,p.63,65-67.
[16]Ibid.,p.90.

nothing innovative about the Sikh initiation ritual, and the rites to mark birth and death. Oberoi surprisingly does not consider the systematic and rigorous religious and moral codes an initiated person was required to follow. This is one of the reasons why the percentage of Sikhs who undergo initiation rite remains fractional, even among the *Kesdhari* Sikhs (Sikhs who retain uncut hair). The Sikh initiation rite is consonant with the teachings of Guru Nanak. Oberoi empties the Sikh initiation rite of its profound, ritual and symbolic significance, and reduces it merely to its overt function as an ethnic marker. But religious rituals aim at transforming the self by overcoming the forces that threaten personal and cosmic harmony and cosmological understandings are communicated in religious rituals.

In other words, Oberoi's suggestion that the beliefs and practices of the Tat Khalsa movement in the nineteenth century marked a fundamental transformation in Sikh identity and were radically different from earlier Sikh tradition is not only difficult to sustain empirically; it is also self-contradictory. The iconoclastic monotheism and egalitarian social values were precisely the principal teachings of the Sikh gurus.

Another basic limitation of the approach adopted by Oberoi is that only a small section of the middle class subscribed to this distinct and standard version of religious identity. In Oberoi's discussion this assumption is thrown into sharp relief. For instance, did a majority of the Sikhs uphold the standard Khalsa paradigm, since it regained hegemony in the nineteenth century? If so, how can the plurality in the Sikh tradition since the nineteenth century be explained? Similarly, was the Sikh initiation ritual endorsed by all individuals who embraced the Khalsa tradition? If so, why has the number of baptised Sikhs remained fractional in the Sikh community? By the same

logic, if the urban mode of religious experience was dominated by the Sanatan paradigm, did all urban Sikhs subscribe to the Sanatan tradition?[17]

Thus, the Singh Sabha expended much of its energy on defending Sikh identity from the inroads of Christian missionaries and from attacks by Hindu proselytizers. Early Sikh organizations were, therefore, involved in the process of defining group boundaries and differentiation from other groups. As Kenneth W.Jones notes, 'Sikhs in future years might debate who they were, but they knew with increasing certainty who they were not: *Ham Hindu Nahin*!'.[18]

The Struggle Over Reconstitution of Sacred Space

In the period between 1920 and 1925, Sikh reformers launched a series of agitations in order to gain management and control of Sikh sacred shrines. The management of Sikh temples had for centuries been entrusted to *mahants*, or priests. The *gurudwara* reform movement of the 1920s had profound implications for the consolidation of Sikh communal consciousness.

Under Sikh rule (1801-49), the Sikh aristocracy and the landed gentry required religious specialists to perform ritual functions for them and the religious intermediaries received generous endowments from their elite clientele in pre-colonial Punjab. Thus, since the eighteenth century, a body of guru lineages and other holy men - the Sanatan Sikhs - had gained control over Sikh shrines. There were fundamental differences in the doctrines and religious practices of Khalsa Sikhs and the Sanatan

[17]Scholars refer the Sanatan tradition to the pluralistic mode of Sikh tradition in the nineteenth century. See Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*,p.xxii.

[18]*Ham Hindu Nahin*,or 'We are not Hindus'. Kenneth W.Jones,'*Ham Hindu Nahin*: Arya-Sikh Relations,1877-1905', Journal of Asian Studies, Vol.XXXII, no.3, May 1973, p.475.

Sikhs. Whereas the Khalsa normative order required Sikhs to maintain the external symbols of the Sikh faith and to adhere to the *rahit* injunctions, the Sanatan Sikhs did not consider it mandatory to maintain unshorn hair and believed that salvation could be attained through their own esoteric methods. The Sanatan Sikhs not only considered the *rahit-namas* not binding on them but they took to idol worship, the worship of living gurus and accepted the caste system as basic to the Sikh faith.

The Sanatan Sikh tradition was generated and transmitted primarily by the priestly class. Three categories of men acted as religious intermediaries: members of guru lineages, holy men (*bhais,sants, babas*) and traditional intellectuals (*gianis,dhadhis*). Thus, a body of guru lineages and other holy men (Sanatan Sikhs) gained control over Sikh shrines and articulated Sikh theology and tradition. Harjot Oberoi contends that although in principle, the role of the guru was exclusively reserved for the holy word of the Sikh gurus and the scripture served as a channel between man and God, in actual practice this doctrine was too abstract. This principle was successfully invoked by the religious specialists to consolidate their position.

The influence of the priestly *mahants* was enhanced under the British by grants of large revenue-free estates to the *gurudwaras* by the colonial state. As a result, the revenue derived from Sikh ecclesiastical property increased enormously. Further, elaborate land-settlement records were compiled by the British authorities and *mahants* were granted proprietary rights over the *gurudwara* estates, which they maintained on behalf of the Sikh community. The *mahants* began to regard the *gurudwara* lands and revenue as their personal property. Allegations of licentious living, misappropriation of funds, debauchery and sacrilege were made against the *mahants* of several

gurudwaras. Some local congregations marshalled popular pressure on them to relinquish control. But the large revenue derived from *gurudwara* estates empowered them to resist popular pressure.

Moreover, the custodians of the shrines, the priestly *mahants*, were accused of 'Hinduisation' of Sikh customs and of flagrant abuse and debasement of Sikh faith. *Gurudwara* priests were accused of committing sacrilege by instating Hindu idols in the precincts of the Golden Temple, the premier Sikh shrine. Reformers pointed with growing bitterness to the prevalence of 'non-Sikh' practices and customs in Sikh worship. Controversy over the mismanagement of Sikh sacred shrines led to a sustained campaign to reconstitute the sacred space by gaining control over the management of Sikh temples. One of the key objectives of the nineteenth century Sikh reform movement was to purge the pervasive influence of Brahmanical beliefs, such as - idolatry, polytheism and priestly presence in rituals, which had crept into the Sikh tradition by expelling the priestly *mahants* or *pujaris*.

Changes in the Larger Political Arena

Spurred by their particular grievances and by the contagion of the prevalent spirit of national consciousness, the Sikhs initiated a campaign of non-violent, non-co-operation against the colonial authorities. Matters were brought to a head on 13 April 1919, when a peaceful public gathering at Jallianwallah Bagh in Amritsar was brutally suppressed by Brigadier General R.E.H.Dyer. Troops were ordered to open fire without warning on the unarmed crowd, killing 379 and wounding more than 2,000 others. The Jallianwallah Bagh massacre became a landmark in the history of India's independence movement. The unsolicited comments to General Dyer by the manager

of the Golden Temple, Arur Singh, provoked a furore in Tat Khalsa circles. The disturbances in the Punjab in 1919 heightened the urgency for control over the management of *gurudwaras* by the Sikh community.

Perturbed by these events, the Punjab government appointed a provisional committee to formulate proposals regarding management of the Golden Temple. The thirty-six member committee was composed entirely of reputable Sikh landed and aristocratic families. The Singh Sabha leadership expressed disapproval of the committee and convened a large gathering at the Golden Temple on 16 November 1920. A new committee of 175 members was elected. However, the new committee included members of the committee appointed by the government. The Punjab government allowed the formation of the committee and pursued a policy of non-interference and neutrality. In December 1920, the new *gurudwara* management committee was named as the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabahandak Committee (SGPC). The SGPC resolved to liberate all *gurudwaras* from the corrupt *mahants*. The SGPC was assisted by the Shiromani Akali Dal a centralised body instituted at Amritsar in December 1920, to coordinate the activities of local bands of volunteers known as Akali *jathas*.[19] The SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal, became the foremost Sikh institutions of the twentieth century and were to play a vital role in Sikh affairs.

[19]The Akalis, or 'soldiers of the *akal*, or immortal', was a militant order, adhering strictly to the Khalsa precepts and ascribing its origin to the tenth Sikh master, Guru Gobind Singh. The Akalis had risen to a position of considerable prominence under Phula Singh Akali, one of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's able commanders. Subsequently, following the death of Phula Singh the order lost its authority and virtually disappeared. The squadrons in the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were called *jathas*.

Following the success of Akali reformers in gaining control of the Golden Temple, attention was focused on the management of the *gurudwara* at Nankana. Nankana Sahib, the site of the birthplace of Guru Nanak, was associated with several shrines marking various events in the guru's childhood. The *mahant* of the *gurudwara*, Narain Das, had a reputation for immorality and licentiousness and had been accused of misappropriating *gurudwara* funds. The misconduct of the *mahant* of the *gurudwara*, had elicited sharp condemnation from the local congregation but the considerable revenue derived from the *gurudwara* estates made the *mahant* immune to the censure of the public. The Akali struggle to gain control of the Sikh shrines was gaining rapid momentum. Public meetings were held and resolutions were passed by the reformers condemning the conduct of Narain Das. Apprehensive of being ousted by Akali reformers, the *mahant* approached the government for protection. While government would not of its own accord take direct action, the incumbent managers of the shrine were encouraged to make private arrangements. Narain Das took matters in his own hands. The *gurudwara* was fortified and some eighty mercenaries were hired to defend the shrine. Arms and ammunition were stockpiled to defend the *gurudwara*. On 20 February1921, an Akali *jatha* made an unscheduled trip to Nankana, without any intention of taking it over. Moments after the *jatha* entered the precincts of the *gurudwara*, the *mahants* men opened fire upon them without warning. Those who attempted to seek refuge within the shrine were chased and slaughtered. The dead and the wounded were then collected in heaps and burnt at the spot, in an attempt to obliterate evidence of the massacre. On hearing the news of the cold blooded massacre at Nankana, thousands of Akalis hastened towards Nankana Sahib. The local

authorities restricted access to the shrine. The government was forced to concede and on 3 March 1921 the management of the shrine was handed over to a temporary committee of Akalis. Narain Das and twenty-six of his henchmen were arrested.

The hideous massacre at Nankana brought several prominent nationalist politicians, including Mahatma Gandhi, to the site. They exploited prevalent anti-government sentiment to imbue Sikhs with a vital nationalism. Meanwhile, the Sikhs were exhorted to join in the nationalist movement of non-cooperation and appeals for boycotting the official inquiry into the Nankana massacre were made. In May 1921, the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee passed a resolution in support of a non-cooperation campaign and issued an appeal to the Sikh community to commence civil disobedience.

In October 1921, the executive committee of the SGPC passed a resolution asking the manager of the Golden Temple, Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, to hand over the keys to the *toshakhana*, or 'treasury' of the shrine to the committee. The SGPC insisted that Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, being an official nominee, represented government control over the sacred treasures of the Golden Temple through its representatives. In November 1921, relations between Sikh activists and the local government deteriorated further, and the Punjab government took possession of the keys to the *toshakhana*. The Punjab government's action evoked a sharp reaction from the SGPC. The committee accused the government of interfering in the religious affairs of the Sikh community. In response to an appeal from the SGPC, Akali *jathas* began congregating at Amritsar and protest meetings were organised. In a gesture of defiance

the Punjab government affixed their own locks to the *toshakhana* escalating the bitterness among Sikhs at the attitude of the Punjab government.

The recurring conflict between the Sikhs and the government was not only imposing strains on Anglo-Sikh relations but the alliance between the Akalis and the nationalists was also being consolidated. Public opinion concerning allegations of government interference in religious affairs was permeating Sikh troops and the Sikh peasantry, the two staunch bastions of the British Raj. In a conciliatory gesture, the Punjab government decided to hand over the keys of the *toshakhana* to the SGPC and the release of all Sikhs arrested in connection with the affair. Mahatma Gandhi telegraphed the SGPC on their success over the key issue, 'Congratulations, First decisive battle for India's freedom won' (*Tribune* 17 Jan 1922). Sikh unrest over the key affair witnessed active co-operation with nationalist politicians and saw Sikh involvement in the mounting nationalist campaign of non-cooperation with government. Thus, Sikh communal concerns became linked to wider Indian demands.

In August 1922, another shrine, Guru-ka-Bagh (the garden of the guru), the site of a small shrine built to mark the visit of Guru Arjan, situated some twelve miles from Amritsar, was the scene of fresh confrontation between the Sikh activists and the government. Controversy over the management of this shrine had resulted in a settlement between the Akalis and *mahant* Sunder Das under which the *mahant* continued to serve as manager of the shrine under the supervision of a managing committee of which he himself was a member. However, in March 1921 the *mahant* revolted against this agreement, forcibly occupied the office of the managing committee and destroyed its records. On 9 August 1922, the Akalis at Guru-ka-Bagh

had chopped wood on land adjoining the *gurudwara* for use as fuel in the *guru-ka-langar* (free community kitchen) provided at the shrine. Sunder Das got them arrested on charges of theft. The arrests at Guru-ka-Bagh sparked off what is regarded as the most famous Akali struggle for control over Sikh shrines. The bitter controversy was over the larger problem of *gurudwara* management. The Akalis contended that the *mahant*, a mere custodian of the shrine, could not claim private possession of sacred property which they insisted belonged to the Sikh Panth. The Akalis warned the government that by denying the Sikhs their religious duty of collecting fuel for the *Guru-ka-langar*, the government was evidently determined to undermine their faith.

News of the arrests at Guru-ka-Bagh attracted other Akali volunteers who marched towards the disputed shrine. The SGPC launched a sustained campaign and dispatched Akali *jathas*, or 'a band of volunteers', daily to Guru-ka-Bagh. Each *jatha* would take a vow of non-violence at the Golden Temple before proceeding to march towards Guru-ka-Bagh to offer arrest. The local authorities arrested them daily. By October 1922, the number of Akalis arrested was more than 2,450. As waves of *jathas* kept coming the authorities began to resort to violent tactics. Nationalist leaders rallied to support the Sikh cause; making speeches at the site of confrontation. C.F.Andrews, who visited the Guru-ka-Bagh in September 1922 was shocked by the brutality of the British administration and noted that the Akali tactics were a 'new lesson in moral warfare'.[20] He protested to the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, Edward Maclagan and the dispute at Guru-ka-Bagh was finally settled and the *mahant*

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[20]J.S.Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, The New Cambridge History of India,p.161;cf. Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Freedom in Sikh Shrines*, SGPC,Amritsar,pp.176-183.

was persuaded to sell the disputed land to Sir Ganga Ram, a notable Hindu philanthropist. In the five year Akali campaign, nearly 400 men had lost their lives, over 2,000 wounded and more than 30,000 had gone to jail.[21]

The Government of India had grave apprehensions regarding the escalating controversy over the management of Sikh sacred shrines. The Sikh Gurudwaras and Shrines Bill of 1925 conceded the management and control of all Sikh religious institutions to the Sikh community. On 7 May 1925, the Bill was introduced in the Punjab Legislative Council and was implemented on 1 November 1925. This Act brought Sikh *gurudwaras* and shrines under the jurisdiction of the SGPC. The Sikh Gurudwara Act was of immense significance for the Sikh community. The guardianship of all Sikh religious institutions in the Punjab conferred a unique religious authority on the SGPC. The income derived from religious property and daily offerings of devotees provided the SGPC access to enormous financial resources. The annual budget of the SGPC from these sources was considerable and was estimated at Rs 841,952,258 for 1995-96.[22]Access to substantial funds enabled the SGPC to establish numerous schools and colleges, hospitals and medical dispensaries. The surplus income enabled the SGPC to recruit a body of *grandhis*, or 'scripture readers' to propagate Sikh tenets. Moreover, the SGPC could exercise its unique sacred authority by issuing *hukamnamas*, or 'edicts' binding upon all Sikhs through the head priests of important Sikh *gurudwaras*. The staffing and management of various institutions under the control of SGPC created a significant network of patronage for the SGPC. This gave SGPC a formidable platform from which to reach the Sikh community. The SGPC

[21]Rajiv A.Kapoor, *Sikh* Separatism,p.xv.
[22]*The Tribune*, 23 March 1996.

rapidly became a forum and a power base for Sikh political action. Thus, the 1925 Act provided an unparalleled, highly organized institutional structure in the form of the SGPC to the Sikhs. The formation of the SGPC, an elected, representative organization of the Sikhs further sharpened the demarcation between Sikhs and Hindus.

Following the passage of the 1925 Act, the Shiromani Akali Dal emerged as an important political party. Due to the close historical evolution of the SGPC and the Akali Dal, close links between the highly organized cadre of Akali workers and the SGPC's cadre of religious functionaries have continued to be maintained till the present day. The Akali Dal derives significant strength from its ability to dominate the SGPC.

Despite the drawing of communal boundaries between the Sikhs and Hindus over several decades, the bonds between the Sikhs and a large body of Punjabi Hindus were strong. A common identification with the social and historical traditions, a shared spoken language and culture bound the two communities together. Following the passage of the 1925 Act, the persistent concern of Sikh leaders became the maintenance of a separate Sikh communal identity. The primary political objective of the Akali Dal was to safeguard Sikh religious liberty by maintaining and promoting separate the political existence of the Sikhs and securing greater political leverage for Sikhs. Under the Montagu-Chelmsford constitutional reforms introduced in 1921, the Sikhs were granted separate electorates in the Punjab legislature.

In the decades prior to India's independence the Akalis had urged Sikhs to participate in the nationalist campaign. The population of British Punjab province was

52 per cent Muslim, 30 per cent Hindu and 14 per cent Sikh.[23] Not only did the Sikhs supply a significant contingent to the Indian army and, though only some 14 per cent of the provincial population, contributed almost one third of the provincial land revenue. The Akalis insisted that Sikhs were not adequately represented in the provincial legislative bodies and pressed for greater Sikh political representation. This was opposed by the Hindu politicians on the ground that Sikhs were Hindus. In all, thirteen Sikhs were represented on both the Council of States and the Legislative Assembly between 1919 and 1947. The Akalis demanded that if separate electorates were maintained, the rights of the Sikhs could only be protected if they were granted a one-third share in any scheme of provincial administration. In 1932, the British administration announced its decision to maintain separate electorates and the reservation of seats in legislatures for minority communities. This decision granted the Sikhs thirty-three of 175 seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly and special representation at the centre. Thus, only 18 per cent representation was granted to the Sikhs in the Punjab legislature. The Akalis were bitterly critical of this decision, or the communal award, as it were called.

When the possibility of a sovereign Muslim state of Pakistan became imminent, the Akali Dal proposed the creation of a new territorial unit of Azad Punjab, or free Punjab, through a redemarcation of the boundaries of Punjab. The Azad Punjab scheme of the Akali Dal was a defensive strategy to create a province in which the Muslim population was 40 per cent, the Hindu population also 40 per cent and the Sikhs, 20 per cent. The dynamic Akali leader, Master Tara Singh declared that

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[23]Government of India, 1931 *Census Report*,vol.17, Punjab, by Khan Ahmad Hasan Khan, Part I, Lahore,1933,p.290.

although Sikhs were a nation, they did not constitute a majority to demand a Sikh state. Therefore, the proposed state was not intended to be a separate Sikh state, but a province which would curtail the constitutional domination by a single community and thus bolster Sikh influence. Such a demand was rejected by the Indian political leaders. A Sikh conference was held in August 1944 and a committee was set up to look into the possibility of the creation of an independent Sikh state. The Akali leaders maintained that if the demand for Pakistan was conceded, the Sikhs would insist on a separate Sikh state, with the right to federate with either India or Pakistan. In March 1946, a resolution adopted by the Akali Dal stated,

> Whereas the Sikhs being attached to the Punjab by intimate bonds of holy shrines, property, language, traditions, and history claim it as their homeland and holy land and which the British took as a 'trust' from the last Sikh ruler during his minority and whereas the entity of the Sikhs is being threatened on account of the persistent demand for Pakistan by the Muslims on the one hand and of the danger of absorption by the Hindus on the other, the Executive Committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal demands, for the preservation and protection of the religious, cultural and economic rights of the Sikh nation, the creation of a Sikh state.[24]

However, even when the Sikh leaders talked of a Sikh state, what they had in mind was still an area in which no single community would form a majority. This they believed would give the Sikhs a secure political position which was necessary to safeguard and guarantee Sikh religious freedom. The Akali leaders contend that they were persuaded to give up this demand at the time upon promises of Congress leaders that the Sikhs would be granted a special status in independent India.

[24]Quoted in Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, Bombay, 1964, p.302.

The striking question with regard to Sikh political demands is: why was there no Sikh nationalist movement in the 1880s in spite of a rising Sikh bourgeoisie and an energetic intelligentsia? Further, why did the Sikhs not aspire to form an independent Sikh state despite the acquisition of a cohesive Sikh identity in the nineteenth century and the historic fact of Sikh rule? It would be misleading to give any definitive answers but broadly speaking, Sikh leaders did not demand a separate Sikh state on the grounds that Sikhs were territorially dispersed and a permanent minority in the Punjab province. They, therefore, reasoned that Sikh political demands had to be confined primarily to questions of representation rather than a separate political status. Here it is useful to remember that Sikh folk memories are infused with bitter struggles against the tyranny of the Mughal rule. In contrast, the bonds between Sikhs and Hindus remained strong, despite the development of inter-communal consciousness. A common identification with the same social and historical traditions, a shared spoken language and culture and similar caste identifications weld the two communities together. Even in religious matters, Sikhism had roots in Indic philosophical tradition, therefore sociologically, Sikh and Hindu religious thought had much in common. Moreover, Hindu and Sikh rulers had frequently formed alliances against Mughal domination and Sikhs had a history of defending the Hindus from Muslim persecutions. It is for this reason, that when Akali Dal shifted its mandate from religious reform to political action in the 1940s, Sikhs collaborated with Hindus through most of the nationalist period. This highlights the tangled and contradictory relations between Sikhs and Hindus. Thus, Sikh political aspirations are characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty and by the need for political compromise with other groups.

In effect, the most important role played by the Singh Sabha was to introduce new associational forms, such as the SGPC - a central committe for the management of Sikh shrines and its political wing - the Akali Dal, which moulded the growth of modern Sikhism. However, the establishment of a modern institutional framework was concomitant with the strengthening of existing traditional institutions of power and patronage, such as the traditional intellectuals and the landed gentry.[25] Also, Sikh shrines continued to be the foci of Sikh activism. Another critical contribution of the Singh Sabha was the establishment of educational institutions and the founding of printing press which published newspapers, books and religious tracts in the Gurmukhi script. Thus, the foremost impact of the energetic activities of Singh Sabha reformers which spanned a period of fifty five years was that it forged the formation of

[25]Three categories of men - members of guru lineages, holy men (*bhais, sants, babas*) and traditional intellectuals (*gianis, dhadhis*), continued to be the bearers of Sikh tradition. For a person to qualify for the title of a *bhai* or a *giani* he had to have the ability to interpret and expound on *gurbani* (the holy word of the Sikh gurus). Thus, the traditional intellectuals kept the Sikh oral tradition of exegesis alive. It was through the the existence of a highly structured body of religious thought that the unlettered Sikh peasantry learnt about the tenets of Sikhism. It was not necessary for them to be able to read the contents of the Adi Granth. As long as the religious intermediaries conveyed to them its message, they could order and express their everyday life experience according to what the text prescribed. Thus, the Adi Granth was venerated by the Sikh peasantry, who acquired familiarity with its contents and message through the traditional intellectuals. This profound historical development is bound to have transformed the religious experience of the rural Sikh population in pre-colonial Panjab. Further, the traditional intellectuals were also involved in imparting secular and religious education at Khalsa schools in villages and towns. Besides, cultural mediaries like *bhais, dhadhis* (musicians who perform in pairs and sing heroic ballads in praise of the heroic deeds of historic Sikh figures) performed in fairs and festivals in villages and towns. The establishment of educational institutions in the villages and the presence of cultural mediators, who were not confined to the urban areas, points towards a new historic form of religious experience.

institutions which were critical in the recasting and revitalisation of Sikh communal consciousness.

III

New Leaders and New Arenas: Recasting Social Identities

There is a growing body of sophisticated literature which demonstrates that some forces were tending in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to create areas of greater ideological and practical uniformity within the broad boundaries of religious affiliation.[26] In this section, we will delineate the processes which gave rise to specific social and ideological formations in colonial Punjab. We will further examine how these profound social transformations energised and hardened pre-existing religious affiliations.

In the preceding sections we have seen that the vital orchestrator of these reform movements was - the editor, the publicist, the writer, the clerk or the subordinate public official. Despite their sectarian orientation, these bodies of men belonged to broadly similar social backgrounds.

Richard G.Fox (1985) has examined the religious reform movements in Punjab in the nineteenth century within the context of longer term socio-economic transformation. He explores the processes that fostered the expansion of a particular social class under the aegis of British colonialism. He explains how the penetration of the capitalist world economy into British Punjab harnessed agricultural production to the world system without radically transforming rural productivity or capital investment. This, Fox argues, altered the existing relations of production in such a way

[26]See for example, Kenneth W.Jones (1989),Richard G.Fox (1985), Gyanendra Pandy (1990).

that it led to an expansion of indigenous mercantile interests. A collectivity of Punjabi money lenders and merchants received their share from the colonial appropriation of rural surplus and combined to form the growing urban lower-middle class. The factors that pre-disposed the fostering of this caste of commodity traders in colonial Punjab has been the subject of some highly stimulating work.[27] That the commercial communities survived into and even expanded their dealings during the colonial period is concluded by C.A.Bayly (1992) in his pioneering study.

The category of leaders who proclaimed moral leadership of communities belonged overwhelmingly to the mercantile castes - aroras, banyas and khattris. However, efforts to represent this community conceptually run into difficulties. The major difficulty is that these classes did not arise out of an industrial revolution as was clearly the case in Europe. Therefore, labels like 'lower middle class (petty bourgeoisie)' employed by C.A.Bayly and R.G.Fox to define this social group are unsatisfactory[28]. No matter which conceptual category we prefer to use, we must bear in mind the distinctive pattern of class formation in India. Thus, the social situation of these reformers allowed them access to the medium of anglo-vernacular education, which enjoined them to acquire bilingual skills and gain hegemony over print medium. To sum up, by the 1880s a distinct commercial class had risen in India. It was these influential commercial and professional classes who spearheaded the anti-colonial, religious reform movements in British Punjab.

[27]The historical processes that facilitated the survival and expansion of commercial castes in colonial India are delineated in C.A.Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, Delhi,1992.
[28]For usage of these categories see, C.A.Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics*, Oxford,1975,p.236 and R.G.Fox, *The Lions of the Punjab*, Berkeley,1985,pp.125-7.

Print Communication and the Creation of a New Public Sphere

We will now consider how the 'revivalist' streams of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism, which originated in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries were energised by the spread of print communication. The most significant aspect of the British Raj was the impetus it gave to the development of indigenous press and publishing. In 1905, of the approximately 260 newspapers and journals published in Punjab, 12 were in English, 18 in two or more languages, 17 in Punjabi (Gurmukhi script), 15 in Hindi, and the remainder in Urdu.[29] Clearly a bulk of the printed communication was in regional languages circulated among a growing audience of literates. These publications accelerated the spread of vernacular scripts, unintentionally helping to turn them into a popular medium of expression of religious and cultural solidarity. The educational and printing activities of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh reformers either promoted or used Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi respectively as a medium of communication. Fellow readers to whom they were connected in print, experienced a feeling of growing communality. Thus, the vernacular press became a powerful medium of correct knowledge and behaviour.

During the philological-lexicographic revolution in nineteenth century Punjab, polemical religious literature served to debate differing opinions in tracts, journals and plays. Sacred texts supporting movements were translated and made available in inexpensive editions. Even texts from the well-established oral tradition were put into print. The philological incendiaries relied extensively on polemical literature and

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[29]N.G.Barrier,'Vernacular Publishing and Sikh Public Life in the Punjab,1880-1910', in Kenneth W.Jones (ed.),*Religious Controversy in British India:Dialogues in South Asian Languages*, Albany, N.Y., 1992, p.201.

exploited cheap popular editions for the new reading public in order to mobilise them for politico-religious purpose. While internal religious polemics pitted social and religious reformers against orthodox members of the same religious community, external polemics was directed between defenders of one faith and the opponents of other faiths.[30] The overall positions articulated in polemical literature were uncompromising and sparked religious controversies between different religious communities.

The writings of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs acted to redefine group identities and heightened the sense of boundary-defining identity. So by 1900, Sikhs 'knew with increasing certainty who they were not: Ham Hindu Nahin!'[31] The most important consequence of the dialectic process of questioning and redefining the past was the recasting of ideological systems which altered the existing relations among different religious groups. The ideological positions and polemical techniques forged in the nineteenth century led to politicized expression of religion in the twentieth century.

To recapitulate thus far: the massive social transformation generated by the British Raj comprised the commercialization of the rural economy and revolution in communications. Both these changes favoured the mercantile, trading castes who gained access to anglo-vernacular education and acquired new skills in the mechanics of print culture. These bodies of men were involved in British employment and educational institutions. It is widely accepted that the rise of the literate, bilingual professional commercial class, and the resulting interlock between specific education

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[30]This point is made by Kenneth W.Jones. See Kenneth W.Jones (ed.),*Religious Controversy in British India*,1992.
[31]Kenneth W.Jones, 'Ham Hindu Nahin:Arya-Sikh Relations,1877-1905',*Journal of Asian Studies*,XXXII,no.3,May 1973,p.475.

and administration was central to the growth of communal consciousness in nineteenth century Punjab. The reformers were based primarily in urban settings where publishing facilities were available and newspapers and journals served to create bonds among members of the receptive audience. This affirms the arresting formulation of Benedict Anderson that, 'Thus in world-historical terms bourgeoisies were the first classes to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis'.[32]

The Development of Standardized Vernacular Languages-of-State

The outstanding communication skills of Christian missionaries not only helped in securing converts but also played a vital role in the standardisation of north Indian languages.[33] The printing process encourages homogenization by standardizing scripts, lexicons and grammatical rules. The general growth in literacy, communications and the expansion of colonial machinery that characterised nineteenth century Punjab created powerful impulses for religion-based linguistic uniformity.

Administrative requirements, alongside the spread of vernacular education allowed the development of selected Indo-Aryan varieties as administrative vernaculars. The British conquest of Punjab witnessed the spread of Urdu, the Persianised form of the lingua franca based on the Khari Boli dialect of Delhi.[34] However, the Urdu norms of Delhi and Lucknow were to come under increasing challenge from its Sanskratised variant, Hindi, the newly formed medium promoted by

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[32]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, 1991,p.77.
[33]The Indo-Aryan languages outside this vast Hindi-Urdu zone, Bengali, Gujarati or Marathiunderwent a broadly similar process of standardisation during the nineteenth century. For an examination of the linguistic and literary aspects of this process see, C.Shackle and R.Snell, *Hindi and Urdu since 1800: A Common Reader*, London,SOAS,1988.
[34]The origins of Urdu might be traced back to the Muslim invasions of India and the resulting Indo-Persian linguistic synthesis came to be termed Urdu.

the Benaras and Allahabad enthusiasts. In 1837, the North Indian administrative language, Persian, was replaced by pre-eminent world imperial language English. In North India, this meant that Persian was replaced by Urdu as the official language of the province in 1855. Thus, Urdu, along with English, enjoyed the officially established medium of provincial administration with its seat at Lahore. Urdu was introduced as the medium of primary education. Since Urdu became the hegemonic language of general communication, all three religious communities in Punjab comprised a considerable proportion of Urdu literates.[35]

The subordinate position of Hindi and Punjabi in government courts and offices contrasted with Urdu, which was well entrenched in the higher reaches of administration. Hindi and Punjabi were promoted by the Arya Samaj and by the Chief Khalsa Diwan respectively through the establishment of an extensive network of private educational institutions and through publishing efforts. The Arya Samaj protagonists challenged the preponderance of Urdu, which represented the Persianate mixed culture of North Indian elites and sought to displace Urdu by Hindi as the official vernacular language. The Hindi-Urdu controversy in nineteenth and twentieth century Punjab resulted in the association of Urdu with Muslim dominance, while Hindi was associated with past resistance to Muslim rule and became the edifice of Hindu nationality.[36] Further, the Arya Samaj polemicists also denounced the use of Punjabi.

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[35]Paul Brass has provided the census figures on religion by literacy in the vernacular languages in British Punjab. For a discussion on literacy and communications see, Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp.300-309.
[36]See, for example, Christopher R.King 'Images of Virtue and Vice:The Hindi-Urdu Controversy in Two Nineteenth-century Hindi Plays', in

It was only in the 1900s that modern standard Punjabi (MSP) developed as a standardised medium of formal literary expression, although the vast bulk of the sacred and literary literature of the Sikhs has been recorded in the distinctive Gurmukhi script, and some form of Punjabi spoken by a majority of Punjabis. What makes the evolution of modern standard Punjabi so striking is that unlike Urdu, which had enjoyed an unbroken pattern of evolution as a literary language, and Hindi, the new Sanskritised variant whose firmly entrenched heritage provided a solid linguistic base, Punjabi had none of these innate advantages. The creation of a literary language as a prime vehicle for Sikh thought and culture was a striking achievement of the Sikh community in the nineteenth century. The Sikh reformers championed the introduction of Punjabi in Gurmukhi script as the medium of education and administration on the ground that Punjabi was the dominant language of the province. They reasoned that Punjabi was the dominant *spoken* language of the province.

Thus Urdu, written in a modified form of the Arabic script, came to symbolize the Qur'an, the core of Islam, while Hindi in the Devanagri script became associated with Sanskrit and the Hindu scriptures and Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script became a marker of Sikh identity. The identification of each of the three major literary languages with one of the three main religious communities in Punjab, generated a struggle among all religious communities to secure a place for their language for administrative purposes. Thus, the struggle over religio-linguistic identity fostered the development of a standardized language of state. The dramatic political effects of this historic struggle culminated in the establishment of Hindi and Urdu as the national languages of India

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Kenneth W.Jones (ed.),*Religious Contoversy in British India:Dialogues in South Asian Languages*,Albany,N.Y.,1992,pp.123-148.

and Pakistan respectively. Thus, print languages were of central ideological and political significance in equating script and separate linguistic identity which underpins contemporary religious identities.

It is important to note that Hindi and Urdu were used by a small proportion of the literate population, the great bulk of the illiterate population spoke the regional or local dialects. How far the urban and rural masses shared in the new vernacularly imagined communities depended to a large extent on the relationship between the masses and the spokesmen of nationalism.

The revolution in print communication and the spread of education also affirmed a transition from the traditional form of learning based on a privileged personal relationship between the teacher and student to a more public and impersonal form of education, imparted in formally organized schools and aided by the availability of printed books. Access to traditional forms of learning, in a ritual setting, had earlier been restricted to a privileged few and the new educational institutions also widened the access of the population to new forms of learning. Here it is useful to remember that although these bodies of men came to promulgate the revitalised religious tradition, they were not traditional intellectuals - the heirs of the historically transmitted traditional learning.

Interpretations of this historic shift stress its dramatic nature. Barbara Daly Metcalf (1992) has argued that this historic shift to a new form of learning entailed a dramatic leveling of caste barriers. People prohibited by birth from receiving education now had access to learning. In a somewhat similar vein, Harjot Oberoi (1994) claims that this new class displaced the traditional cultural bearers like the *nais*, bards,

minstrels, genealogists, healers, local saints, shamans. The traditional mediators like the *nais* and *mirasis* had key ritual roles in customary matrimonial practices and in transmitting social values. They were entitled to customary obligations from their patrons in exchange for their services. Oberoi argues that the, 'New elite that cut across kin ties, neighbourhood networks and even caste affiliations'.[37] In the process, the traditional social order based on kinship was destroyed and replaced by a standard, highly uniform Sikh tradition, and allegiances based on kinship were replaced by religious solidarity in colonial Punjab.

In the light of these accounts which conjure a dramatic historical transformation, let us now consider some historical facts. In 1881, approximately 87 per cent of the population of Punjab province lived in the 34,000 villages[38]and further ninety three per cent of the population of Punjab - an overwhelming majority - was still illiterate![39]Between 1891 and 1921, the proportion of the provincial population living in urban areas was at 9.5 per cent of the total population. [40]Thus, only a minuscule, privileged minority was directly affected by these historical processes. Nonetheless, even if only 7 per cent of the Punjabi population was literate by the late 1880s, this was a proportion unprecedented in the history of Punjab. Moreover, these literates were committed to a rapid increase in their own numbers.

Therefore, Oberoi's description of the sudden and radical displacement of one set of cultural bearers by another group and the destruction of a social order, at a

[37]Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*,p.265.
[38]*Census 1891*, p.253 and p.lxix, Abstract 61.
[39]*Report on the Census of the Punjab*, by D.C.J.Ibbetson, Lahore,1883,p.17.
[40]Rajiv A.Kapoor,*Sikh Separatism*,p.42.

specific historical moment is oversimplified and deficient. Even if we are to accept Oberoi's suggestion, how can we explain the striking presence of cultural mediators, such as - *pirs, bharais, mirasis, ojhas* and saints, who were meant to have perished in the nineteenth century, in contemporary Punjab? It seems implausible that teachers, journalists, lawyers and clerks displaced the traditional mediators. Oberoi contends that marriages were now arranged through new networks and (reformed!) marriage rites. The Anand Marriage Bill introduced in the Imperial Council in October 1908, which conferred legal recognition on the Sikh marriage ceremony, made the role of traditional social groups (i.e..*nais*) redundant. One wonders how all the marriages could possibly have been arranged through newspapers, when the majority of the population resided in rural tracts and was not literate. Colonialism did bring about a profound social transformation in Indian society. But Oberoi's restricted view only describes the social transformation among the Sikhs; he thus overlooks the profound implications of the wider changes in the socio-economic sphere in colonial Punjab.

If the outcome of the revolution in print culture and founding of modern style educational institutions was confined to the new urban elite, how might we explain the extraordinary success of the reform movements? What were the factors that conduced towards mass mobilization? The founding of the printing press went together with the establishment of an extensive social network which successfully intervened at the level of everyday life. Traditional methods of transmitting and disseminating information through personal and institutionalised relationships continued to remain equally influential. Moreover, improved mobility by train, bus and rail facilitated the rapid increase in the number of pilgrims visiting pilgrim centers, where they could be

informed about reform movements. Further, the bulk of the population of the province was occupied in agricultural pursuits. Early in this account, we have seen how the vast horde of unlettered Sikh peasantry was mobilised through the Akali *jathas* on specific issues, such as control over Sikh sacred shrines.[41] Undoubtedly, the politically vigorous Sikh bourgeoisie of town dwellers spearheaded the anti-colonial Sikh reform movement which also linked them to the peasantry. Although important, a comprehensive analysis of the historical circumstances within which the fateful alignment between the Sikh bourgeoisie and the massive reservoir of Sikh peasantry arose lies outside the scope of our account. However, in very general terms, a substantial section of both the strata of the population felt cramped by the British Raj, driving them into a coalition.

In contrast, Hindus pre-dominantly resided in urban areas and were engaged in the commercial activities of the bazaar. This facilitated the vigorous permeation of the aggressive message of the Arya Samaj to Punjabi Hindus.

Conclusion

We have been dealing with a long period of North Indian history and with a society in great turmoil in which every idea and every structure was constantly contested. Any essentialisations must, therefore, be avoided. An examination of the historical and social development of early Sikh tradition shows that along with an evolving inventory of Sikh separatist symbols and a doctrinal discourse, the Sikhs possessed the key

[41] See also Richard G.Fox, *Lions of the Punjab:Culture in the Making*, University of California Press,1985, for a major argument about the distraught conditions of the rural peasantry in the 1920s which facilitated the Akali reformers to induct the aggrieved agriculturists into a movement of mass protest.

concomitants of a distinct and separate practice. Further, the political triumph of the Sikh movement and the establishment of the powerful Sikh empire under Maharajah Ranjit Singh, imbued Sikh identity with the symbolic memory of Sikh rule. Finally, the social and religious reform movement among Sikhs during British colonial rule resulted in the establishment of an institutional framework which provided the arena and base for Sikh separatism.

However, our study attempts to locate the growth and consolidation of Sikh identity within the wider context of historic and social forces prevailing during each period of our study. Let us now recapitulate important aspects of the nineteenth century reform movements which resulted in the revitalisation of religion and the emergence of sharper group boundaries. The transfer of new forms of organizational structure and techniques such as printing, modern style associations and education by the British introduced new arenas of power and competition, which unwittingly created a political context which permitted and even invited communal competition. However, the new institutional framework, revitalised and restructured existing patterns of public debate and knowledge rather than create anything anew. Thus, print capitalism energised the existing tendencies toward differentiation between the diverse religious communities rather than, as in Benedict Anderson's formulation, created a radically new consciousness. The growing cleavages among religious communities in Punjab were partially a continuation of existing patterns of hostility, accented by the emergence of new institutional framework for communal competition.

In a recent article, C.A.Bayly (1994) has stressed the conflict and amalgamation of the British and the indigenous elements in the formation of classes

and dominant ideologies in colonial India. He argues that although every area of Indian life was subjected to the powerful and distorting influences of colonial rule, structures and ideologies of the Indian past remained vital. The nature of colonial and modern India has to be determined by the collusion of these two elements. He further argues that the history of political events in colonial India demonstrates that some of these economic and ideological formations came into conflict with the colonial state. Remarkably, the rising commercial classes spearheaded the anti-colonial, religious reform movements in British Punjab. Although there is considerable evidence to also support the view that the rise of new social formations *also* provided allies, infrastructure and compatible ideologies for the colonial and post-colonial state.

It may now be possible to challenge influential explanatory interpretations of change in India, which impute it to British policy and British. One such view is Richard G.Fox's (1985) formulation that it was the British view of the Sikhs, which projected the British army as the saviour and guardian of the Sikh 'martial race' and the recruitment policies based on that view which *created* a distinct Sikh identity. Another is the view espoused by Harjot Oberoi that the Sikh commercial class of town dwellers was an indispensible element in the growth of Sikh communal consciousness and it was, in fact, the vigorous Sikh bourgeoisie who *created* a new episteme, a standard discourse of modern Sikhism. So also the widely influential claim that the 'divide and rule' policy of the British, in fact, nurtured and incited religious communalism as a counter weight to emerging Indian nationalism.[42]

[42]Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial India*, Delhi, 1990.

Rather I have argued that the interplay between the general growth in literacy, communications and the expansion of imperial bureaucracy on the one hand and the socio-religious reform movements on the other hand, gave birth to religio-linguistic nationalisms at the end of the nineteenth century in Punjab. Print capitalism facilitated the historic formation of languages of everyday life to the sacred languages of scriptures. Thus, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi became languages of sacred communication of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism; this heightened communal consciousness. These nationalisms were responses by power groups primarily, but not exclusively. Finally, these religio-linguistic nationalisms laid the bases for national consciousness, from which arose the anti-imperialist national resistance.

4
The Rise of Sikh National Consciousness (1947 - 1995)

In chapter three we traced the evolution of the Sikhs from a religious congregation in the sixteenth century into a fully formed ethnic community during the period of the British Raj. In this chapter we continue our examination of growth of Sikh separatism from the period of India's independence (1950-1966) upto the current Sikh unrest (1970-1995). We begin by posing some key questions. These questions emerge out of our concern to develop a conceptual framework to understand the emergence of Sikh ethno-nationalism. How do we explain the emergence of a movement aiming to create a separate Sikh state of Khalistan in the 1980s? What are the factors which gave rise to a fierce Sikh ethno-nationalism in the 1980s?

The chapter will focus on the growth of Sikh national consciousness. It is divided into two sections. The first section considers the Akali movement for a Punjabi *Suba* or 'a Punjabi speaking state'. Our focus is on the nature of the demand for a Punjabi speaking state and the tactics and strategies employed by the Hindu and Sikh elites. The fallout of the Punjabi *suba* movement on communal consciousness is further examined. The second section examines the processes which gave rise to the Sikh armed resistance for the formation of a separate Sikh state of Khalistan. We will begin by considering the historic Anandpur Sahib resolution which outlined the policy and programme of the Akali Dal in independent India. This is followed by an examination of the meteoric rise of a charismatic Sikh preacher, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and the subsequent army

assault on the Golden Temple in 1984. We will examine the rise and disintegration of the Sikh guerrilla movement focussing on the impact of the policies of the central government on regional demand. Finally, we will discuss the role of the Sikh diaspora in the movement for the formation of a separate Sikh state of Khalistan.

I
The Demand for a 'Punjabi *Suba*' or a Punjabi -speaking State in Independent India (1950-1966)

The foremost controversy to push India to the brink of civil disorder soon after independence was the language issue. While the burning issue in the 1950s and 1960s was a linguistic one, it is the religious issue that poses the gravest threat to India's secular foundations since the 1980s. The debate over the question of an official language before partition was centered around the Hindi-Urdu controversy. Mahatma Gandhi advocated Hindustani, as a neutral between Hindi and Urdu as an official language. However, when the reality of partition became apparent, Hindustani was voted out as an official language by a margin of one vote in the Constituent Assembly in 1946. Hindustani still remains the *lingua franca* of a large part of South Asia. After independence, the question of the determination of a national language and an official language was based on the choice between Hindi and English. The framers of the Constitution of India accorded constitutional status to most of the major regional languages of India, but Hindi, the language of the dominant north Indian Hindu majority, was chosen as the official language of India. English was to coexist alongside Hindi for official purposes.[1]

[1]Statistical projections for the year 2000 extrapolated by Myron Weiner, show that the dominant caste Hindu majority, those who speak Hindi, the official regional language as their mother tongue, will decline from 52 per cent to 45 per cent by the year 2000. For further details see, Myron

The nation-wide movement of linguistic groups seeking statehood resulted in a massive reorganization of states according to linguistic boundaries in 1956. However, Punjabi, Sindhi and Urdu were the only three languages not considered for statehood. This prompted the Akali Dal to launch its first major agitational movement in August 1950, which spanned over two decades. Thus, the language dispute in post-partition Indian Punjab, has to be viewed within the wider context of controversies prevailing throughout India during the 1950s and 1960s.

The independence of India in 1947 and the sanguinary partition of British Punjab between India and Pakistan on the basis of Hindu and Muslim majority areas, altered the demographic composition of Indian Punjab dramatically. As communal riots broke out, the entire Hindu and Sikh population of the western districts of Pakistani Punjab fled to India. Similarly, Muslims of Indian East Punjab moved to Pakistan. The Sikhs were divided equally, constituting 2 million each on either side of the Punjab province, one scheduled to go to India and the other to Pakistan. As a result of the emigration of the Sikh population in 1947, the Sikhs lost Lahore, the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and 150 historic Sikh shrines including Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak. They also had to leave their richest lands in the canal irrigated zones of west Punjab. Indian Punjab secured thirteen out of twenty nine districts, which amounted to 38 per cent of the land area.[2] The mass migration of refugees altered the communal composition of Indian Punjab significantly. Punjab became a dual-community province. The displacement of Muslims

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Weiner 'India's minorities: Who are they? What do they want?', in James R.Roach (ed.), *India 2000: The Next Fifteen Years*,The Riverdale Company, Maryland, 1986, pp.99-135.

[2]S.Mahmud Ali, *The Fearful State: Power,People and Internal War in South Asia*, London,1993,p.91.

increased the Hindu majority, while the Sikhs were transformed from a small, dispersed minority into a substantial, compact minority in Indian Punjab. Further, the urban-rural demographic pattern of post-independence Punjab was such that the Hindu population was concentrated largely in urban areas. In 1948, Punjab was again divided into two administrative units. The small Sikh princely states were merged to form a new state of PEPSU or Patiala and East Punjab States Union. The Sikhs and Hindus were in equal numbers, 49.3 per cent and 48.8 per cent in PEPSU.

The emigration of the Muslim population in 1946-47 meant that the status of Urdu was no longer a major issue in Punjab. Conflict was over the status of Punjabi language. The Akali Dal formally presented their case for the creation of a Punjabi *suba* or a Panjabi speaking state to the States Reorganization Commission established in 1953. The Akali Dal appealed for the amalgamation of Punjabi-speaking areas of existing Punjab, PEPSU and the neighbouring state of Rajasthan. The Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab and PEPSU were to merge with neighbouring Hindi-speaking regions. The Akali Dal reasoned that a unilingual state would provide for education and administration in the language of the area and this would allow for the development of Punjabi culture. The position of the Akali Dal is stated in a manifesto:

> The true test of democracy, in the opinion of the Shiromani Akali Dal, is that the minorities should feel that they are really free and equal partners in the destiny of their country ... to bring home a sense of freedom to the Sikhs, it is vital that there should be a Punjabi speaking language and culture. This will not only be in fulfillment of the pre-partition Congress program and pledges, but also in entire conformity with the universally recognised principles governing formation of provinces ... The Shiromani Akali Dal has reason to believe that a Punjabi speaking province may give the Sikhs the needful security. It believes in a Punjabi speaking province as a autonomous unit of India. [3]

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[3]Quoted in Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2, p.296.

The Akali Dal projected the demand for the formation of a Punjabi-speaking state, or a Punjabi *suba* overtly as a linguistic issue, shadowing on the domain of centre-state relations in India. However, the fundamental issue was not so much a linguistic one as it was a question of the rights and claims of a minority community. In 1951, 62.3 per cent of the total population of Punjab comprised the Hindus and the Sikhs were 35 per cent.[4] The abolition of separate communal representation in independent India, raised Akali apprehensions about the survival of the Sikhs as a separate entity. In colonial India, Sikh communal representation in the political bodies had ensured a degree of political representation to the Sikhs. The prospect of having little political leverage as a minority community raised Akali apprehensions as they sought to protect their language and religion in a Hindu dominated society. Thus, the language controversy became a symptom of a deeper quest for recognition and power by a minority community in a multi-ethnic state.

In post partition Punjab, the Arya Samaj protagonists spearheaded the campaign of aggressive promotion of Hindi among the Hindus. They opposed the adoption of Punjabi as an official language in the Punjabi-speaking region and launched a successful campaign exhorting Punjabi Hindus to repudiate Punjabi as their mother tongue and to declare themselves as Hindi speakers. As a consequence, the Hindus declared Hindi as their mother tongue in the 1951 and 1961 censuses. Since the census enumerators were instructed not to verify the response of the respondents and record whichever language

[4] Rajiv A.Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*, London, 1986,p.208.

the respondents gave as their mother tongues, Paul Brass notes, "There is good reason to believe, therefore, that the 1961 census accurately reflects the language preference of the people of the Punjab, although certainly not the actual mother tongue spoken."[5] More striking still is Paul Brass's (1974) inference that the existence of a widely spoken or written idiom does not necessarily generate linguistic consciousness. He has emphasised the distinction between capacity to communicate and willingness to communicate a particular language. He further notes, "The dominant Hindu majority, unable to assimilate the Sikhs, adopted the tactic of avoiding their language so that the Sikhs, a minority people by religion, might become a minority by language as well."[6]

By 1971, only one-half of the five million Hindus in the state declared Punjabi as their mother tongue. The Hindus raised the slogan of 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan', evoking the dangerous trinity of Hindi language, Hindu religion and Hindu India. Paul Brass has discussed the Punjabi *suba* movement at considerable length in his book *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (1974). He points out that although the process of linguistic identification based on the religious component was at work since the last century, the repudiation of the mother tongue by the Punjabi Hindus in the 1951 and 1961 censuses was ever more dramatic because "it was an overt and deliberate political act designed to undercut the linguistic basis of the Punjabi *suba* demand." [7] Hindu organizations accused the Akali Dal for emphasising the linguistic argument as a camouflage for the eventual creation of a state in which the Sikhs would form a majority.

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[5]Paul Brass , *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, 1974,p.293.
[6]Brass, *Language, Religion*,p.298.
[7]Brass, *Language, Religion*,p.327.

The Akali demand became the subject of a major controversy between the Sikhs and Hindus of Punjab and between the Akali Dal and the Congress government. In its report, the States Reorganization Commission rejected the demand for Punjabi *suba* primarily on two grounds. First, in its report the Commission did not recognize Punjabi language as distinct grammatically or spatially from Hindi. The second reason given for the rejection of the demand was that the movement lacked the general support of the people inhabiting the region. The lack of support referred to the Punjabi Hindus who opposed the formation of a Punjabi speaking state.

The dismissal of the demand by the Commission did not outrage the Sikhs perhaps as much as the rejection of a separate status of Punjabi language. Sardar Hukum Singh, then associated with the Akali Dal wrote, "While others got States for their languages, we lost even our language".[8] The Akali Dal maintained that the refusal to concede their demand by the States Reorganization Commission constituted discrimination against a religious group which spoke a distinct language. They claimed that Punjabi was a grammatically and lexically distinct language from Hindi. As Fateh Singh stated, "No status is given to the Punjabi language, because Sikhs speak it. If non-Sikhs had owned Punjabi as mother tongue then the rulers of India would have seen no objection in establishing a Punjabi State".[9] Further, the Akalis contended that had Hindus formed a majority in the proposed Punjabi *suba*, the demand would have been conceded without

[8]Quoted in Brass, *Language, Religion*, p.320.

[9]Quoted in Brass, *Language, Religion*, pp.325,326. An article by Sant Fateh Singh, 'The Sikhs are Slaves', 27 Aug 1965, published in *Two Talks*, p.46.

any question. The refusal of the central government to accept the demand was primarily because it would reduce the Hindu majority in the province.

The rejection of the Akali demand by the States Reorganization Commission prompted the Akali Dal to launch the Punjabi *Suba* Slogan Agitation of 1955. In an attempt to pressurize the government to concede their demands the Akali Dal undertook widespread political demonstrations. The agitational tactics of the 1920s were resurrected. In response to a call by the Akali Dal, Sikh volunteers from all over the province gathered at Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. As Akali *jathas* marched out of the Golden Temple shouting slogans in favour of Punjabi *suba*, they were arrested. The Akali campaign continued unabated and 12,000 Sikhs had been arrested in nearly two months.[10] The agitation was terminated twice by negotiations with the Congress. The Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru was adamant in rejecting the demand on the ground that it was a communal demand. In May 1966, a prolonged movement was launched in which 26,000 Sikhs courted arrest.[11]

The development of internal differences over strategy and tactics between Akali leaders resulted in the displacement of Master Tara Singh by one of his lieutenants, Sant Fateh Singh in 1962.[12] Sant Fateh Singh, a Jat Sikh, commanded a substantial following

[10]Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*,p.213.
[11]Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*,p.215.
[12]In post-independence Punjab, the Shiromani Akali Dal has split into rival factions from time to time. In this study, reference to the Akali Dal is to the dominant Shiromani Akali Dal. Moreover, the elevation of Sant Fateh Singh as leader of the Akali Dal was a vital signal of the displacement of non-Jat Sikh Akali leaders. The proportion of Jat Sikh legislators has increased steadily in post independence Punjab. A study conducted by the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRID) shows that between 1967-80, the proportion of Jat Sikh ministers in the Punjab government was some forty nine per cent. See the table representing the caste of the Punjab ministers from 1952 upto 1980, *Punjab Crisis:Context and Trends*, p.47,48.

Srinagar
JAMMU & KASHMIR
HIMACHAL PRADESH
TIBET
PAKISTAN
Gurdaspur
Hoshiarpur
Amritsar
Lahore
Jullundur
Simla
Ludhiana
Ferozepore
Chandigarh
PUNJABI SUBA
Dehra Dun
Patiala
Ambala
UTTAR PRADESH
Karnal
Meerut
Hissar
HARYANA
Moradabad
Delhi
RAJASTHAN
Gurgaon
0
50
100
Kilometres
Aligarh
Mathura

among the peasantry and held a base in the *gurudwaras*. In 1965, Sant Fateh Singh succeeded in gaining control over the SGPC.[13] The strength and success of the Akali Dal depended considerably upon the ability to appropriate the resources of the SGPC, which provided an arena and base for Sikh political activity. The involvement of large masses in public demonstrations is illustrated by "the Punjabi Suba Slogan Agitation of 1955, in which an estimated 12,000 Sikhs were arrested, and the massive Punjabi Suba Agitations of 1960-1, in which an estimated 26,000 volunteers were arrested and which was marked by two epic fasts, first by Sant Fateh Singh and then by Master Tara Singh."[14]

In the mean time, the death of Jawaharlal Nehru brought new leaders in the central government, who were more receptive to regional demands. The outbreak of war between India and Pakistan in September 1965 provided the Indian government the opportunity to express their appreciation for the contribution of the Sikhs in war efforts to defend India. In March 1966, the Indian parliament finally accepted the Akali demand for Punjabi *suba*. The state was trifurcated in September 1966 under the Punjab State Reorganization Bill. The southern, Hindi-speaking, plain districts were formed into a new state of Haryana, the other Hindi-speaking hill districts to the north of Punjab were merged with neighbouring Himachal Pradesh and the remaining Punjabi-speaking areas formed the new state of Punjab. The new Punjabi *suba* thus created was nearly 54 per cent Sikh and 44 per cent Hindu.[15] The new city of Chandigarh, designed by the French architect Le Corbusier

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[13]The prefix 'sant' refers to 'a worthy and virtuous man'. The institution of the 'sant' is widespread in Punjab. The 'sants' often reside in *deras*, or 'hospices', which are scattered all over Punjab and provide food and shelter free of cost.
[14]Brass, *Language, Religion*, p.317.
[15]Rajiv A. Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*, p.216.

Post-1966 Punjab

and built in the 1950s to replace Lahore, was declared the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana, until Haryana could create a new capital.

The main driving force of the Punjabi *suba* movement was that the Sikh leadership saw a separate political status for the Sikhs as essential to preserve an independent Sikh entity. Thus the Akali leader Master Tara Singh noted in 1945, "there is not the least doubt that the Sikh religion will live only as long as the *panth* exists as an organized entity".[1] The Akali Dal presented itself as providing this critical organization, the Khalsa *panth*, which elicited allegiance from its Sikh constituency. It was further argued that the *panth* was based on the common ideology of Sikh religion. A prominent Akali leader argued that the ideology of the *panth* binds its adherents together in "Kinship which transcends distance, territory, caste, social barriers and even race".[2] By this logic the *panth* was coeval with the Sikh nation. On the question of participation in politics, the Akali Dal claimed that the Sikh community acting as a single political group was imperative for the existence of Sikh religion. It was argued that participation in politics by the Sikhs acting as a community was built into Sikh religious ideology, for Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa *panth* in order to organize his religious followers into a political community. Apart from this he hardly made any other changes in the doctrines formulated by the first Sikh master, Guru Nanak. Thus, the Akali leadership drew on an interpretation of Sikh history and traditions in order to enhance and legitimise their authority in the struggle for critical political leverage. The Akali leaders believed that it was essential to provide the Sikhs with political leverage in order to preserve an independent Sikh entity. This could be possible if

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[1]Master Tara Singh foreword to Sarup Singh, *The Forgotten Panth*, Amritsar, 1945.
[2]Sarup Singh, *The Forgotten Panth*, p.10.

the Sikhs had a territorial unit in which they were the dominant population. By this logic the Akali Dal came to identify itself with the Sikh *panth*.

Following the achievement of the Punjabi *suba*, the Akali Dal emerged as a governing party and this marked a new phase in electoral politics. The fear of the Punjabi Hindus at the prospect of a Sikh dominated society and the apprehension of the central government in creating a Sikh dominated state were to prove equivocal. Although the various agitational campaigns had amply demonstrated the strong support for Akali Dal by the Sikh community, the Sikh electoral support was not confined to the Akali Dal. The Sikhs did not vote exclusively along communal lines. The Congress Party had enough Sikhs in positions of power to make it a powerful contender for support from a significant body of Sikh voters. Thus, in the first elections in reorganized Punjab, the Congress party succeeded in electing more Sikh legislators than the Akali Dal.[1] As a consequence of this cross-communal following of the Congress Party, the Akali Dal managed to obtain not more than 30 per cent of the total votes in the five elections to the Punjab legislative assembly held between 1967 and 1980.[2] Thus, the Akali Dal has had to compete with the Congress Party for electoral support from the Sikhs. The Akali Dal was ousted from power in the Punjab Assembly elections held in 1972. In the elections to the lower house of Parliament in 1980, the Congress won twelve out of thirteen seats from Punjab. This demonstrates the appeal of the Congress party to voters of Punjab.

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[1]Brass, *Language, Religion*, p.360.
[2]Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*,p.217.

From the creation of the Punjabi *suba* to 1980, the Akali Dal has managed to come to power only by forming a coalition government. In the first elections in reorganized Punjab, the Akali Dal succeeded in forming a coalition government in an alliance with the Jan Sangh and the Communist Party. The Akali alliance with the Jan Sangh, the political arm of the Arya Samaj, founded in 1951 and a party with essentially Hindu communal appeal was particularly baffling as its president had gone on record to state that, 'The Jana Sangh regards the Sikhs as part and parcel of the Hindu Society'.[3] Once again in the mid-term poll of 1969, the Akali Dal came to power only with the assistance of the Jan Sangh. The history of party politics in Punjab, thus vividly demonstrates that if competitive electoral politics has permitted mobilisation along communal lines, remarkably enough, the Indian parliamentary system has also facilitated inter-communal collaboration. In this context, the Punjab case illuminates how political parties, in their quest for power, collaborated in the electoral process, thereby bringing together Hindus and Sikhs on a common political platform. Thus, the creation of a Sikh dominated territorial unit did not ensure political power for the Akalis. The Akali Dal has had to strive to appeal to the Hindus in order to broaden its electoral base or seek electoral alliance with other political parties. The Akali Dal's control over the SGPC and its political appeal combined to make it a formidable force in Punjab politics.

Census operations also intensified communal consciousness in Punjab. Census officials and enumerators in their desire for uniformity frequently had preconceived definitions and classifications of groups, which influenced the census results considerably.

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[3]Quoted in Brass, *Language, Religion*, p.333.

This also gave opportunity to interest groups to organize efforts to influence the census returns. Such efforts by Muslim organizations urging Muslims to declare their mother tongue as Urdu and Arya Samaj protagonists to persuade Hindus to declare Hindi their mother tongue are noted by Paul Brass in the censuses of 1911, 1921 and 1931.[4] In the Hindi-Urdu controversy, Punjabi was the chief loser as Punjabi was forfeited for Hindi or Urdu by Hindus and Muslims. Despite the influx of millions of Punjabi speaking Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistani Punjab during partition, the Hindi movement in Indian Punjab reduced the number of Punjabi speakers in the 1961 census to a minority for the very first time in the history of the census. Although Punjabi was the language of the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, it became increasingly identified with the Sikhs alone. Thus, Punjabi was transformed into a minority language in the successive censuses.

The history of the Punjabi *suba* movement throws light on the significance of language as a symbol of group identity. We have seen how language became a symbol of contest for political power between the Hindu and Sikh elites in post-independence Punjab, as religious meaning was infused into language identification. Thus, the Punjabi *suba* movement consolidated the process of linguistic differentiation on the basis of religion between the Hindus and the Sikhs. In this chapter we will contest Paul Brass's view that the "standing of a language in relation to particular social groups is not something fixed, but may evolve and change over time and may be subject to deliberate direction. Such has

[4]See Paul Brass, *Language, Religion*, p.292,293.

been the case at least with regard to language in the Punjab in modern times."[5] All of the preceding evidence indicates that the historic process of equating linguistic and religious identity was facilitated by the creation of the modern administrative state and by print capitalism in the nineteenth century in British Punjab. Further, modern institutions, such as the state and the census reports, reinforced the fusion of linguistic and communal identities. Thus, Hindi came to be identified ever more strongly with the Hindus and Punjabi became synonymous with Sikh identity. Thus, in Punjab the identification of a language with a particular social group has only intensified over time.

II
Background to the Present Conflict (1970-1995)

The Anandpur Sahib Resolution

Between 1981 and 1984, the Akali Dal led a series of peaceful mass demonstrations to present a set of grievances to the central government. The core of the Akali Dal's demands were based on a resolution adopted by the working committee of the Akali Dal at Anandpur Sahib in October 1973, outlining the policy and program of the party.[6] The issues raised in the historic Anandpur Sahib resolution were political, economic and social.[7] The primary political objective stated in the Anandpur Sahib resolution was the 'pre-eminence of the Khalsa through creation of a congenial environment and a political set up'.[8] The political goal stated in the resolution, the Akalis pointed out, was not in

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[5]Paul Brass, *Language, Religion*,p.292.
[6]It was at the holy city of Anandpur that the tenth Sikh master, Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa *panth*.
[7]The Anandpur Sahib resolution was drafted by Kapur Singh, a former officer in the prestigious Indian Civil Service(ICS) and a product of Oxford University. He was an advisor to the Akali Dal and in 1962 he was elected to the Parliament.
[8]Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2, p.346.

itself new but a reiteration of the Akali Dal's earlier objective, prior to India's independence, to preserve and maintain the distinct and independent entity of the *panth*. In order to achieve this political goal, the resolution outlined seven key objectives. These were,

(1) The transfer of the federally administered city of Chandigarh to Punjab. It was argued that although the Punjabi *suba* had been conceded in 1966, Punjab still shared its capital, Chandigarh, with the neighbouring state of Haryana.

(2) The readjustment of the state boundaries of Punjab to incorporate certain Sikh populated Punjabi-speaking areas, presently outside and contiguous to Punjab.

(3) The reexamination of the centre-state relations under the existing constitution of India so as to grant a measure of provincial autonomy to all Indian states. The powers of the central government should be confined to external affairs, defence and communications.

(4) The call for land reforms. Loans be provided to farmers at the rates given to industrialists and non-remunerative prices be fixed for agricultural produce. The rights of weaker sections of the population be safeguarded. Further, all key industries should be brought under the public sector. The central government should invest in setting up heavy industry in Punjab, in order to alleviate the industrial stagnation of the state.

(5) The enactment of an all-India *gurudwara* Act which would bring all the historic *gurudwaras* in India under the control of the SGPC.

(6) The Sikh minorities living outside Punjab be provided protection.

(7) By reducing the recruitment quota of Sikhs in the armed forces from 20 per cent to 2 per cent, the Indian government was keeping the Sikhs out of their traditional professions in its new recruitment policy.

The text of the Anandpur Sahib resolution became a subject of considerable controversy. Although rival factions of the Akali Dal adopted different versions and different interpretations of the Anandpur Sahib resolution, it was endorsed by a significant body of Sikh intelligentsia, Sikh servicemen and politicians. On the question of Sikh political autonomy, the Akalis tacitly denied that the Anandpur Sahib resolution envisaged an autonomous Sikh state or Khalistan. As President of the Akali Dal declared, "Let us make it clear once and for all that the Sikhs have no designs to get away from India in any manner. What they simply want is that they should be allowed to live within India as Sikhs, free from all direct and indirect interference and tampering with their religious way of life. Undoubtedly the Sikhs have the same nationality as other Indians."[9] Addressing a Sikh conference, a prominent leader proclaimed that, 'Sikhs were still struggling for asserting our rightful claim to our identity and nationhood.'[10]

The meeting of the Akali Dal in 1978 endorsed the principles and objectives of the Anandpur Sahib resolution. In February 1981, the working committee of the Akali Dal reiterated that the party would strive for the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib resolution. Between August 1980 and September 1981, the Akali Dal organised a succession of seven peaceful agitations in which 25,000 volunteers courted arrest, in

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[9]Quoted in Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle*, p.50.
[10]Quoted in Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*, p.221.

order to accentuate their demands.[11] A set of forty-five demands were submitted to the central government in September 1981. These demands reflected the core objectives of the Anandpur Sahib resolution and two new grievances were enlisted. These were,

(1) The reallocation of available river waters of riparian Punjab to other non-riparian states. Under the present arrangement regulated by the central government, it was calculated that 75 per cent of the river waters of Punjab were being allocated to other states.[12] Further the reduction of government control over hydro-electric installations.

(2) The recognition of Sikh personal law.[13]

As negotiations between the Akali leaders and the central government began in October 1981, the list of forty-five demands were reduced to fifteen. The core of these demands concerned the socio-economic grievances over the centralisation policies of the Indian government which were adversely affecting the rural sector of the society. [14] There seemed nothing unconstitutional about the Akali demand to seek greater autonomy for all Indian states. However, these negotiations continued sporadically for a period of two and a half years, with the Akalis accusing the government of intransigence, bad faith and deliberate delaying tactics.

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[11] Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2, p.350.

[12] Joyce J.M.Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, London, 1995,p.5.

[13] Khushwant Singh is of the view that the Akali Dal formulated the demand for a Sikh personal law only in January 1984. Under article 25 of the Indian constitution, the Hindu marriage Act and the Hindu Succession Act was applicable to the Sikhs. The Akali Dal demanded an ammendment to article 25 of the constitution on the ground that Sikhs were a distinct religious community. See Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2,p.352.

[14] The manner in which the centralisation policies of the Indian government, concerning control over the productive and development process propelled agrarian unrest in Punjab in the late 1970s is examined in detail in Chapter 5.

Once again, the Akali Dal organised mass agitations in order to pressurise the government. In April 1982, the Akali Dal organised the *nahar-roko*, or 'cease the canal', campaign to obstruct the construction of a canal which would divert river water to the neighboring state of Haryana and would deprive the Punjab's peasantry of vital water resources. The agrarian interests seem to be at the heart of the issue. Peasants were also urged to refrain from repaying the loans due to the government in protest. The characteristic Akali agitational style of passive resistance was resurrected. Each *jatha* would proceed to the site of construction daily and be subsequently arrested. The Akali campaign continued unabated and by September, some 20,000 agitators had courted arrest. This campaign was suspended briefly for negotiations with the government which were unsuccessful. In response, the Akali Dal gave call to a new one-day *rasta roko*, or 'block the roads' campaign in April 1983 to disrupt vehicular traffic on Punjab's national highways. Similarly, the Akali leaders announced a one-day *rail roko*, or 'block the rails' campaign to stop railway services in the state. In August, *kam roko*, or 'halt the work' campaign to hamper functioning of the state administration was organized. These political demonstrations were flooded with volunteers from all over the province and proved remarkably successful. The Indian government had grave apprehensions of widespread Sikh unrest. In October 1983, the Punjab legislative assembly was dissolved bringing the state under complete control of the central government. These developments coincided with the rise of a charismatic Sikh preacher, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was born at village Rode, near Moga town, in a peasant family in 1947. Jarnail Singh was enrolled at the Damdami Taksal at an early age by his father.[15] The bright young pupil memorised passages from the Sikh scriptures by rote and became the favourite disciple of Sant Kartar Singh, the head of the Taksal. Sant Kartar Singh was fatally injured in a car accident, but before his death he appointed Jarnail Singh as his successor in preference to his son Amrik Singh. Amrik Singh later became a close associate of Bhindranwale and on completion of his university education, he went on to become President of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF).

He toured the villages of Punjab exhorting the Sikhs to return to the puritanical ways of the Khalsa and enjoined them to bear the Khalsa symbols. He was actively engaged in proselytizing activities. An essential feature of his preaching was that religious values should be central to life. Bhindranwale's remarkable ability to quote religious texts

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[15]Damdami Taksal is a historic seminary founded by Shaheed, or 'martyr' Baba Deep Singh, a heroic figure in Sikh history. Sikh tradition informs us that Baba Deep Singh had vowed to defend the Golden Temple from desecration by the Afghan army. In 1757, Baba Deep Singh had led an army to defend the Darbar Sahib and in the ensuing conflict with the Afghan army,Baba Deep Singh was intercepted and decapitated. Tradition has it that Baba Deep Singh still managed to fight his way to the Darbar with his head in one hand and wielding his sword in the other.

'Taksal', or 'mint' describes the pure and unalloyed Sikh precepts taught and preached at the seminary. Young boys trained at the seminary are taught Sikh scriptures in the traditional mode of education. On completion of their education, they serve as traditional intellectuals or *ragis*, or 'a group of three hymn singers'. The Taksal is engaged in a range of religious activities, such as social work, missionary activity and education. At present it is involved in the reconstruction of the Akal Takht, damaged during the army invasion of the Darbar Sahib in 1984. It is presently headed by the aged, Baba Thakur Singh. The headquarters of the Damdami Taksal are at *gurudwara* 'Gurdarshan Prakash' in the village of Mehta Chowk, some 25 miles from Amritsar. The name Mehta Chowk is often used to refer to the *gurudwara*. The Taksal is a widely respected institution of the Sikhs.

when delivering sermons enabled him to establish a rapport with his audience. He urged his congregations to undercut the spread of consumerism in family life and abstain from the degenerative consumption of drugs and alcohol, the two main vices to afflict rural society in Punjab. Bhindranwale's crusade for social reform denounced customs such as dowry and endorsed simple lifestyles. Bhindranwale rapidly came to acquire a considerable following among the unlettered Sikh peasantry, women and the Sikh youth.[16]Women and children had been the worst sufferers at the hands of drunken and violent men.[17] As an Indian feminist and environmentalist comments, 'The Sants following grew as he successfully regenerated the good life of purity, dedication and hard work...These basic values of life... had been the first casualty of commercial capitalism.'[18]People soon began to seek his intervention in addressing social grievances and he began to hold court to settle disputes. This reflected the widespread disenchantment among the masses with bureaucratic procedures which were expensive, time consuming and often did not ensure justice. Bhindranwale's verdicts were widely respected. This 'robinhood image gave Bhindranwale enormous popularity.'[19] Until his death, Bhindranwale maintained that he was a man of religion and not a politician.

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[16]At a later stage, smugglers, petty criminals and Naxalites, a term used to refer to left wing extremists in India, also infiltrated Bhindranwale's retinue.

[17]Punjab has the highest per capita income of alcohol in the country, Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar:Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle*, New Delhi, 1985, p.74.

[18]Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, London, 1991,p.185-6.

[19]For further evidence of this point see Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, 1984, p.28 and Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar:Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle*,p.102,103.

Meanwhile, following the historic nation-wide defeat of the Congress party by the Janata party, the Akali Dal had formed a coalition government with the Janata party in 1977. The Akali Dal had launched powerful campaigns to protest against the imposition of emergency by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. It was the most successful opposition party in India to oppose the promulgation of the draconian Maintenance of Internal Security Act which gave power to the police to arrest and detain without trial. The Congress party, therefore, was desperate to disintegrate the formidable Akali Dal. It was looking for someone who could challenge and put an end to the traditional Akali hegemony over the SGPC. Bhindranwale's position as head of the historic Damdami Taksal and his swelling popularity as a religious preacher made him a formidable political ally. In the vital SGPC election in 1979, Bhindranwale was promoted and supported by the Congress leaders to put up candidates against the Akali Dal.[20] Nonetheless, Bhindranwale was to become an outspoken critic of the Congress party. In 1980, the Congress party returned to power in the Punjab State Assembly elections.

All through this period, the vernacular press in Punjab had been critically engaged in fomenting the religious divide between the Hindus and the Sikhs. In its study on the role of the press in inflaming communal passions in Punjab, The Editors' Guild of India reported: 'Responding to the general climate of sectarian confrontation and polarisation, it

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[20]For evidence and detailed argument about the role of the Congress party in exploiting the political potential of Bhindrawale in a bid to disintegrate the Akali Dal,see Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar:Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle*, New Delhi, 1985, pp.57-83. Similar arguments on the role of the Congress party in bringing Bhindranwale to the forefront of Punjab politics are presented in Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2, 1989,pp.332-341.

is disturbing to note that newspapermen in Punjab by their own admission are divided all the way down on communal lines. We were repeatedly told this quite candidly in Chandigarh, Jalandhar and Amritsar by a variety of journalists, both Hindu and Sikh. This is a sad commentary and a matter for deep professional and social concern. If the press becomes partisan, the images it reflects will be distorted. The reporters who met us preferred to discuss matters individually and separately rather than collectively in an open forum.'[21] It was in this charged atmosphere that Lala Jagat Narain the proprietor of the Hind Samachar group of newspapers was assassinated in September 1981. As an Arya Samaj leader he had played a prominent role in exhorting Punjabi Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue. His editorials had consistently attacked the Akali leaders and the Congress for promoting Bhindranwale. Following the assassination of Lala Jagat Narain, there were incidents of violence as a mob of Hindus set fire to Sikh shops and burnt the offices of a Punjabi newspaper, *Akali Patrika*, at Jalandhar. The government acted hastily and arraigned Bhindranwale in the assassination of Lala Jagat Narain.

At the time, Bhindranwale was giving a sermon at the Chando Kalan *gurudwara* in Haryana. The government ordered his arrest and a contingent of the Punjab policemen was dispatched to Chando Kalan. The armed entourage took seven days to cover 300 kilometers from Punjab to reach Chando Kalan at Haryana.[22] By the time they arrived at the *gurudwara*, Bhindranwale had already left. The frustrated police officers indulged in acts of arson. The villagers went on record to testify that the policemen set fire to vans

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[21]Quoted in Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*,p.41.
[22]Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2,p.335.

and burnt Bhindranwale's sermons. Bhindranwale was outraged, not because of his alleged complicity in the murder of Lala Jagat Narain but because of the burning of his sermons by government officials. He alleged that these actions amounted to the 'insult of my Guru'.[23] On 20 September 1981, Bhindranwale voluntarily offered his arrest at his headquarters at Mehta Chowk, near Amritsar. He was kept under detention for twenty-five days and after intensive interrogation and on the behest of senior Congress leaders, he was released due to lack of evidence. The indiscreet actions of the government generated much sympathy from the Sikh community and the Akali Dal. After this incident, Bhindranwale disassociated himself from the Congress party and subsequently moved to Guru Nanak Nivas.[24]

In the meantime, the Akali Dal launched the *dharam yudh*, or 'battle for righteousness' under the leadership of Sant Harchand Singh Longowal in August 1982, in order to highlight their grievances.[25] Bhindranwale and the Akali Dal joined hands together for the first time. A batch of Akali volunteers would march out of the Darbar Sahib everyday and would be arrested for violating the order banning the assembly of

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[23]Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar:Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle*,p.68.It is critical to note that Bhindranwale's outrage at the burning of his sermons must be viewed in the context of the Sikh doctrine of *guru granth* which embodies in the scripture the figure of an eternal guru.

[24]Guru Nanak Nivas is a building in the precincts of the Darbar Sahib and adjacent to the SGPC offices.

[25]Sant Harchand Singh Longowal(1934-85) was a Jat Sikh whose induction into politics was through the religious network. He had earlier been a the guardian of the *gurudwara* at his native village Longowal and achieved a reputation for piety and social work. His links with the SGPC had brought him into the political arena and he had contested the Punjab state assembly elections in 1969 on Akali ticket. Following the arrest of the established Akali leadership during the Akali campaign against the imposition of emergency (1975-77)in India, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal emerged as the leader of the Akali Dal.

more than five persons. The agitation proceeded unabated and in a period of two and a half months, 30,000 Sikhs had been arrested.[26] Many women too joined in the agitation. As the number of arrests surged it became very difficult for the authorities to accommodate the protesting volunteers in the existing jails. The government was apprehensive of the widespread response to the Akali agitation. In a conciliatory gesture the central government released all Akali volunteers and resumed negotiations with the Akali Dal. The conspicuous presence of Sant Bhindranwale during the discussions was another factor in the discussions. A settlement is believed to have been virtually reached but Bhajan Lal, the Chief Minister of Haryana, played a critical role in sabotaging the talks. Mrs Indira Gandhi failed on finding a settlement and this was to have grave consequences.

Meanwhile, serious differences between Bhindranwale and the Akali leadership headed by Sant Longowal began to surface. Bhindranwale was skeptical of the capacity of the Akali leaders to make easy compromises with the central government lured on by the prospect of power. He also mistrusted the intentions of the Congress government to resolve the grievances of the Sikhs in good faith. These differences accentuated divisions between the Akali Dal headed by Sant Harchand Singh and the hard-liners, supported by the Sikh youth through the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), under the patronage of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. While the Akali Dal was vulnerable to the carrot and stick policies of Mrs Indira Gandhi, Sant Bhindranwale was adamant that nothing short of the Anandpur Sahib resolution would be acceptable.

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[26]Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*,p.60.

In November 1982, the Akali Dal announced that it would hold peaceful demonstrations in Delhi during the Asian Games. The government wanted to avoid any disturbances in the capital during an occasion of international significance. All out efforts were made to prevent Akali agitators from reaching Delhi. All buses, trains and vehicles heading for Delhi were stopped on the way and every Sikh traveling to Delhi hauled out and searched. Among those who suffered indignity were senior Sikh retired army officers. Two Sikh army Generals, Shahbeg Singh and Jaswant Singh Bhullar went on record to state that the humiliation suffered during the Asian Games was a factor in their decision to join Bhindranwale.[27] It was for the first time that the Sikhs as a community felt discriminated in independent India. On 23 December, the Akali Dal organised a convention of Sikh ex-servicemen at the Darbar Sahib which evoked a good response. Of the 5,000 ex-servicemen who attended the convention, 170 were retired officers above the rank of a colonel. Allegations were made of discrimination against Sikhs in government service.

The situation in Punjab was worsening steadily as the number of violent incidents escalated. These incidents included bank robberies, bomb explosions, the burning of railway stations, selective killing of public men and politicians, indiscriminate firing on

[27]Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*,p.66 and Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar:Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle*,p.89. Major General Shahbeg Singh became a close associate of Bhindranwale and played a crucial role in the fortification of the Darbar Sahib and directed the armed resistance to the Indian army during Operation Bluestar. Major General Shahbeg Singh was a hero of the Bangladesh war in 1971 during which he had trained and led successful guerrilla operations. He was dismissed from service on charges of corruption on the day he was due to retire without a court martial. He proved his innocence later on when the civil courts dismissed the charges against him. He still nurtured a deep sense of injustice done to him by the Indian government despite the distinguished service that he had rendered for the country.

religious congregations and sacrilege of religious places.[28] In October 1983, the violent activities took a bizarre form and a number of innocent Hindu passengers traveling on a Delhi bound bus were taken out of the bus and murdered in cold blood. In order to curb the wave of violence, Punjab was brought under complete control of the central government through the imposition of Presidents rule in October 1983. Nonetheless, the violence continued unabated. Ramesh Chander, the son and successor of Lala Jagat Narain was assassinated in May 1984. As the violent encounters escalated, the Akali Dal and the SGPC blamed the central government for the bloodshed. In May 1983, the president of the SGPC stated that the turmoil in Punjab was a 'sustained conspiracy of the Punjab Government to foment communal trouble'.[29]

In February 1984 the Akali Dal led a campaign to protest against the wording of article 25 of the Indian constitution. Article 25 of the Indian constitution pertains to the freedom of religious worship given to all citizens. The Akali Dal objected to the Sikhs being defined as Hindus in clause (2) (b)of article 25. A pamphlet circulated by the Akali Dal stated,

> India is a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-national land. In such a land, a micro-scopic minority like the Sikhs has genuine forebording that ... they may also lose their identity in the vast ocean of overwhelming Hindu majority. Their misgivings are heightened by arbitrary manner in which they are defined as Hindus under Article 25 of the Constitution.[30]

[28]For a list of violent incidents see, *White Paper on the Punjab Agitation*,New Delhi,1984, pp.110-162.
[29]Quoted in Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*,p.228.
[30]Quoted in Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*,p.228.

Several Akali leaders were arrested as they burnt the portion of the Indian constitution containing Article 25 (2) (b) in protest.

'Operation Bluestar' and 'Operation Woodrose'

The Akali Dal threatened to launch a new campaign of mass non-cooperation on 3 June 1984. The Sikh peasantry was exhorted to prevent the movement of food grains out of Punjab and to stop the payment of land revenue and water rates to the government. The Akali Dal chose 3 June, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Arjun, the founder of the Golden Temple, to launch this mass non-cooperation campaign against the government. Ironically, this was the day that Mrs. Indira Gandhi gave orders to the army to launch an attack on the Darbar Sahib. Operation Bluestar was the code-name given to the assault on the Darbar Sahib by the Indian army in June 1984.

The government prepared itself for the final assault. The borders of Punjab were sealed off from the rest of the country and censorship imposed on the press in Punjab. Curfew was imposed at Amritsar and the army cordoned off the Golden Temple complex. The supply of water and electricity to the Golden Temple was cut off. Troops equipped with tanks and heavy armor took up strategic positions around the Darbar Sahib. A large number of pilgrims had gathered at the temple to pay obeisance and participate in the special services due at the Golden Temple to mark the martyrdom anniversary of Guru Arjun. According to one estimate, there were some 10,000 pilgrims in the temple on 3 June. This included a large *jatha* of about 1,300 people who had come to court arrest for

the *dharam yudh morcha* of the Akali Dal.[31] In the first phase of Operation Bluestar, the Akali leaders who were inside the temple complex were flushed out and detained. The impending military action in the bastion of Sikhism prompted the agitated Sikh peasantry to converge upon Amritsar in large numbers. Army tanks blocked the movement of some 30,000 Sikhs near Amritsar, many were killed in the action.[32] Helicopters were brought in to spot the mobs and tanks and armored vehicles used to disperse the heavy crowds. The government feared the outbreak of a Sikh uprising and decided to launch a full scale attack on Darbar Sahib.

Grenades, tanks and armored vehicles were used to attack the Temple from all sides and helicopters flew overhead to fire and guide the armored vehicles inside the temple complex. The army took control of the temple on 6 June. A large number of innocent pilgrims, including women and children, officially described as "the enemy", were killed in the heavy barrage of cross firing. The troops shot scores of Sikh young men at point-blank range with their hands tied behind their back.[33] Most accounts put the number of civilian casualties at 5,000 and 700 officers are estimated to have lost their lives in the army action.[34] The shells fired by the tanks brought down the edifice of the Akal Takht, the seat of Sikh temporal power. The bullet ridden bodies of Bhindranwale, General Shahbeg Singh and Amrik Singh were found in the basement of the Akal Takht. Officers of the Indian army commented that Bhindranwale and his followers had fought with

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[31]Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*,vol.2,p.366.
[32]Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*,p.100.
[33]This account is based on an eye witness report by Brahma Chellani of Associated Press published in *The Times*, London, 14 June 1984.
[34]J.S.Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.227.

courage and commitment to the last man. Similar assaults were carried out by the army on forty other *gurudwaras* where Sikh activists were alleged to be hiding.

It took the army several days to gain control of the temple, resulting in heavy casualties on both sides and substantial damage to sacred property. Many rare manuscripts and archives housed in the Sikh reference library located inside the temple were burnt in the army action. D.S.Duggal, the director of Sikh reference library categorically stated that no damage had been done to the research library until the evening of 6 June when he departed the library. He accused the troops for deliberately setting fire to the Sikh archives.[35] The soldiers were accused of desecrating the temple and indulging in looting and robbing the temple treasury and other valuables. Among the treasures lost in the army action was a priceless gem-studded canopy presented by Maharajah Ranjit Singh.

Sant Longowal had warned the government of serious consequences of launching an army operation on Darbar Sahib. He had written, 'every bullet fired at the Golden Temple will hit every Sikh wherever he be in the world'.[36] The entire Sikh community was outraged, not so much by the death of Bhindranwale but by the all out assault on their premier shrine by the Indian army. On hearing the news of the Indian army's action, Sikh troops deserted their regiments in several parts of the country and many Sikh soldiers attempted to march towards Amritsar to defend their faith. They were intercepted by the authorities and scores of them were killed and others marked out for court martial. Several

[35]Joyce J.M.Pettegrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*, London,1995,p.35 and Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2,p.366.

[36]Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2,p.363.

Sikhs resigned from top government posts, eminent Sikh intellectuals returned honours bestowed on them by the government and many Sikh politicians resigned from the parliament in protest.

The government acted in haste and speedily rebuilt the Akal Takht before handing it to the temple high priests and not to the SGPC in October 1984. This perpetuated resentment among Sikhs who felt that the government had snatched the prerogative from the Sikh community to rebuild their historic shrine through the customary *kar seva*, or 'voluntary service in accordance with Sikh tradition'.[37] The actions of the central government gave credence to the widespread belief that Operation Bluestar was a deliberate attempt to humiliate the Sikhs. It was alleged that the Congress party had itself brought Bhindranwale to prominence and the government could have chosen some other way to arrest Bhindranwale and his followers. The government could have perhaps laid a siege around the temple complex to persuade Bhindranwale and his followers to surrender. The immediate fallout of the army action for the Sikh community, is described by Khushwant Singh. He notes, 'The army action widened the gulf between the Hindus who had welcomed it and the Sikhs who had not, and gave the movement for Khalistan its first martyr in Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale'.[38]

In the months following the attack on Darbar Sahib, between June to September 1984, the government conducted Operation Woodrose, as the attempt to prevent the outbreak of widespread public protest in the province was code-named. All prominent

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[37]The original workmanship on Akal Takht was done by Muslim craftsmen and many Sikhs lament the fact that the building can never be restored to its original grandeur.

[38]Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2,p.378.

Akali leaders were detained and a ban imposed on the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF). The army combed the countryside and thousands of Sikhs, especially the youth were detained for interrogation and many were tortured and killed. It was during this period that a substantial number of rural Sikh youths crossed over to neighbouring Pakistan.[39] The government instituted draconian ordinances which enabled the authorities to arrest persons without warrants and to detain people without a trial in the province. Under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act or TADA of 1985 the accused were presumed guilty unless they could prove their innocence. Further, confessions extracted under torture were treated as evidence. The government established extraordinary judicial procedures under the Special Courts Act which allowed trials to be conducted *in camera* and the accused were given no right to appeal. Many Sikhs, among whom were several retired army officers, were charged with sedition and detained under the National Security Act or NSA of 1987. The NSA allows a person to be detained without trial and the accused given no legal representation. The central government was accused of introducing draconian legislations in order to repress a minority community.

On 31 October 1984 the Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi, was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards, seemingly as an act of revenge. Following the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi, anti-Sikh riots broke out in several parts of the country. Sikhs were singled out, lynched and burnt alive. The capital city of Delhi was worst affected and Sikhs became the targets of brutal mob violence. Of the 10,000 Sikhs

[39]The Indian press published a spate of allegations charging the Pakistan government for offering training and weapons to Sikh guerrillas.

massacred in the pogroms, some 6,000 - 8,000, including 30 officers in uniform were killed in Delhi alone.[40] Sikh property worth Rs 300 crores was looted and gutted in arson and over 50,000 Sikhs were rendered refugees in Delhi.[41]

Reports published in the Indian press accused the civil administration, the police and the Congress party with complicity in the mob violence against the Sikhs. An independent inquiry by two human rights organizations reported that, 'the attacks on members of the Sikh community in Delhi ... far from being spontaneous expressions of "madness" and of popular "grief and anger" at Mrs Gandhi's assassination as made out by the authorities, were the outcome of a well-organized plan marked by acts of both deliberate commission and omission by important politicians of the Congress ... and by authorities in the administration.'[42] The report further stated, 'the police all over the city uniformly betrayed a common behavioural pattern marked by (I) a total absence from the scene, or (ii) a role as passive spectators, or (iii) direct participation or abetting in the orgy of violence against the Sikhs.'[43] Further, the refusal of the central government to order an official inquiry into the anti-Sikh riots enraged the Sikh community. Eleven years after the anti-Sikh riots, the government has not arrested any person in this connection so far. The actions of the government dramatically compounded the alienation felt by the Sikhs and gave ample credence to the widespread belief of an official conspiracy against the Sikhs.

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[40] Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2,p.385.
[41] Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2,p.385.
[42] People's Union for Democratic Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties, *Who are the Guilty?: Report of a Joint Inquiry into the Causes and Impact of the Riots in Delhi from 31 October to 10 November*, Delhi, 1984, p.1.
[43] People's Union for Democratic Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties, p.4.

In the parliamentary elections held in December 1984, the Congress party secured an overwhelming victory and an absolute majority in the parliament. Mrs. Gandhi's son, Rajiv Gandhi who had earlier been unanimously selected as the leader of the Congress party became the Prime Minister of India. However, elections were postponed in Punjab and the province continued to be governed by the central government. In the meantime, the Akali Dal and the SGPC threatened to launch another agitation if the government did not institute an official inquiry into the pogroms against the Sikhs in November 1984 and urged the government to release senior Akali leaders detained since Operation Bluestar. In March 1985, leading Akali leaders were released and in May 1985, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal was reinstated as the head of the Akali Dal. Soon after his release, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal began an extensive tour of Punjab. He addressed a series of public meetings enlisting Akali Dal's demands for a peaceful settlement in Punjab. The more important of these demands were that the central government should render an apology to the Sikh community for storming Darbar Sahib, the institution of an official inquiry into the Delhi massacres, the withdrawal of draconian judicial procedures and anti-terrorist legislations in the province, the rehabilitation of Sikh soldiers discharged from the army and the release of innocent Sikh detainees. He, however, categorically stated that the Akali Dal did not favour a separate Sikh state of Khalistan. He further reiterated that the grievances of the Akali Dal were with the central government and that his party was committed to Hindu-Sikh harmony. The government invited Sant Longowal for secret unilateral negotiations and on 24 July 1985 an eleven point memorandum of settlement was signed. This came to be known as Rajiv-Longowal Accord.

The Rajiv-Longowal Accord did not directly concede any of the Akali Dal demands. Just three points of the settlement dealt with substantial issues. These were, first, the issue of greater autonomy for Punjab was referred to a commission which was to make recommendations on centre-state relations to the central government. Second, it was agreed to transfer Chandigarh to Punjab on the condition that some territory of Punjab would be transferred to Haryana and a commission was set up to determine which areas of Punjab would be transferred to Haryana. Other territorial disputes between Haryana and Punjab were also referred to a boundary commission. Third, the question of reapportionment of river waters was similarly addressed and referred to a tribunal. Other issues stipulated in the memorandum of settlement were that the central government would provide compensation to victims of violence in Punjab since August 1982, although the terms and conditions for determining the extent of compensation and to whom it was to be paid were not specified. The memorandum stated that Sikh soldiers discharged from the army would be reinstated but no leniency would be shown towards Sikh troops charged with mutiny and waging war against India.

A broad cross-section of the Sikh population did not endorse the Accord. Some Akali leaders denounced the accord as a “sell out” and expressed reservations regarding the central government’s commitment to implement the accord. Others criticised the agreement on the grounds that unilateral negotiations on Sikh demands with the central government undermined the confidence in the Sikh constituency. Moreover, resentment towards the traditional Akali leaders accentuated divisions in the Akali Dal. This subsequently led to the formation of a rival Akali Dal. The United Akali Dal was headed

by Baba Joginder Singh, father of Sant Bhindranwale. In the mean time, the growing unrest in Punjab was compounded by the migration of some 20,000 to 30,000 Sikh refugees from different parts of the country to Punjab.[44] In May 1985, transistor bomb explosions in Delhi, orchestrated allegedly by Sikh migrants from Delhi killed nearly eighty persons. On 20 August 1985, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal was assassinated reportedly by Sikh extremists. The central government called early elections in Punjab to deflect the growing dissension over the Rajiv-Longowal Accord.

The elections were boycotted by the United Akali Dal in protest against the settlement with the central government. Thus, the elections became a straight contest between the Akali Dal and the Congress party. The Akali Dal emerged victorious and secured seventy-three seats and the Congress only thirty-two seats in the State Assembly. Finally, the Akali Dal had achieved its dream to form a provincial government independently. The election results revealed the growing polarization between the Sikhs and the Hindus in Punjab. The Akali Dal received broad support from the Sikhs, while the Hindus voted in favour of the Congress party. 'Never were the Punjabis split so clearly on communal lines as in the elections of September 1985.'[45]However, the newly formed provincial government was faced with the formidable challenge to ensure the implementation of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord. The various Commissions set up by the central government to determine the terms of settlement either failed to give a verdict or their recommendations were unacceptable. Chandigarh was not transferred to Punjab on

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[44]Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2,p.385.
[45]J.S.Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p.230-231.

26 January 1986, as promised by the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. The Chief Minister of Punjab accused the central government for delaying the implementation of the agreement and the central government accused the state government for not dealing firmly with the deteriorating law and order situation in the province. In January 1986, the Damdami Taksal, supported by the United Akali Dal and the AISSF resumed the reconstruction of the Akal Takht. At a meeting in Amritsar on 29 April 1986, a resolution was adopted proclaiming Khalistan, following which the Akali government was pressured to send security forces into the Golden Temple Complex. The acrimony between the Akali government and its Sikh opponents was causing serious dissension within the Akali Dal. In May 1986, President's rule was imposed in Punjab and the province was once again brought under direct control of the centre.

Thus, far from curbing extremist activity, Operation Bluestar and Operation Woodrose fomented considerable alienation among a broad cross-section of the Sikh population. Further, the massacre of the Sikhs following the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi and the failure to implement the Rajiv-Longowal Accord culminated in a fresh outburst of violent activity in the province. It is in this context that the campaign for Sikh separatism developed into a guerrilla movement posing a grave threat to the unity of India.

State Violence and the Rise and Fall of Armed Resistance

What are the factors that propelled a significant body of Sikh youth into an armed struggle for national independence against the Indian state in the 1980s? The limited and fragmentary nature of source material poses special problems in answering the above

question. Considerable risks were involved in securing access to the militants during the period of active armed resistance and at present, most of the Sikh activists have been eliminated by the Indian para-military forces. My primary source material draws on my fieldwork experience, conducted between October 1992 to April 1993, during which I met several persons involved in the guerrilla movement. I have also relied on the account presented by Joyce J.M.Pettigrew (1995), which is based on recorded interviews with guerrilla activists of Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) conducted on her behalf by Ajit Singh Khera.[46]

Both the above accounts delineate two phases of the guerrilla movement. The recruits to the guerrilla movement were initially those captivated by Bhindranwale's message and personality and survivors of the aftermath of Operation Bluestar and Operation Woodrose. As Joyce J.M.Pettigrew notes, 'all guerrillas mention that it was the behaviour of the security forces towards them and their families that finally drew them into the struggle'.[47] She further observes that issues of injustice and inequality were foremost themes reiterated by her interviewees. Further, the religious context was invoked by the guerrillas to legitimise the armed resistance. They explained the centrality of social and economic justice in Sikh religious tradition and armed resistance as a moral response to restore justice and to fight oppression.[48] They claimed that the first Sikh master, Guru

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[46]My main source of information on the guerrillas was Mr S.S.Bal, a journalist for the *Punjabi Tribune*. He had conducted extensive first hand interviews with the guerrillas and their families and greatly obliged me by providing his rare data, which he had collected with considerable difficulty, involving a risk to his life.

[47]Joyce J.M.Pettegrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*,p.139.

[48]The economic context of the armed resistance is discussed in chapter 7. It may be appropriate to emphasise that militants construed the state

Nanak repudiated the divinely ordained Brahmanical hierarchical structure of power and wealth. At this historic moment, they believed that the central government represented the interests of the Brahmins and the guerrilla resistance represented a transposition of the fundamental precept of Sikh faith, which was to offer a challenge to the Brahmanical belief system.

The movement had suffered a major setback at an early stage. A significant number of its political leaders had been eliminated in Operation Bluestar and Operation Woodrose and many survivors went underground for fear of harassment and torture by the paramilitary forces. Attempts to resurrect the guerrilla movement were initiated by those with some trade union experience, or members of the splintered AISSF or those associated with the religious seminary, the Damdami Taksal.[49] Between 1987 to 1988, resistance began to proliferate and the strength of guerrilla groups surged. However, until 1987, guerrilla activities were sporadic and un-coordinated, largely confined to the Amritsar and the Gurdaspur regions.

The official policy to the Sikh unrest was to suppress the movement by brute force and seemed little concerned with remedying the causes of the violent conflict. In order to subvert the movement, it was vital to create a wedge between the guerrillas and the

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repression as an extension of the economic repression that they were being subjected to. Further, an armed resistance was a means to resurrect Sikh honour, which was an extension of their personal honour.

[49]This point is attested in the information that I gathered about the militants during my fieldwork. A similar observation is made by Joyce J.M.Pettegrew. For information on the personal experience and circumstances which drove them into guerrilla acrtivity. See Joyce J.M.Pettegrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*,pp.137-186. The method of recruitment was based on traditional associations of kin and friendship.

civilian population. Therefore, the government perpetuated a major counter-insurgency operation in order to destabilise the movement. Guerrilla cadres were infiltrated by undercover policemen and criminals inducted in the police force to malign the guerrillas. This led to an outburst of incidents of looting, extortion, murder and rape. It was common for the entire village to be evacuated for a house-to-house search during which the security forces freely indulged in brutal acts of violence, rape and arson. Armed bands stalked the countryside and the identity of a policeman and a militant became blurred. The confusion between the policeman, the militant and the criminal is also noted by Joyce J.M.Pettigrew, 'A large part of the problem for ordinary villagers was that they had no means to identify a genuine militant. At one stage a family would be visited by persons masquerading as militants . . . At another stage, the same family would be confronted by the same persons dressed as police who accused them of feeding and sheltering militants overnight and then either killed them outright or took from them a large sum of money. Innumerable families could report events of such nature.'[50]

Between 1989 to 1991, civilian casualties arose from 54 per cent to 73 per cent of the total number of killings and ordinary Sikh villagers became the targets of an unprecedented orgy of violence.[51] The wealthier families migrated to cities, often abandoning their land holdings in fear of abduction or extortion. A situation of general lawlessness prevailed and the scale and nature of violence suggests the wider breakdown

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[50]Joyce J.M.Pettegrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*,p.114.
[51]Joyce J.M.Pettegrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*,p.77.

in social relationships in the province. The 'lumpen' or those referred to in India as the 'anti-social' elements of society, such as smugglers and criminals exploited the coercion from the guerrilla groups and the paramilitary forces. Armed bands plundered the farming families and the rural masses were subjected to brutal attacks on their lives and property.

By 1988, a serious rift grew between the main guerrilla organisations over issues of policy and tactics. The core of the ideological difference was whether to raise the issue of social reform, notably an anti-dowry and an anti-alcohol campaign during the armed struggle. Splits in the resistance intensified between 1990 and 1991.[52] Once the paramilitary forces had succeeded in eliminating the ideologically committed cadre, the weakness in the organizational structure of the guerrilla groups became evident. The average life span of a militant was 'no more than three years'[53] and this induced the guerrilla organisations to draw in fresh recruits continually.[54] Moreover, in an attempt to broaden their mass base, the guerrillas had inducted recruits without proper scrutiny and many recruits had not gone through any ideological training or a training in surveillance tactics. This perpetuated an overall lack of discipline among the guerrilla cadres. Further, the guerrilla groups had instituted a decentralised organizational structure in order to minimise the risk of infiltration. [55] All these factors encouraged many guerrillas to secure a

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[52]The split was between two main guerrilla organizations, the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) and the Car Jhujharu Jathebande (CJJ). The Car Jhujharu Jathebande (CJJ)constituted two other guerrilla groups, The Babbar Khalsa and Khalistan Force. For details of the guerrilla organizations, see Joyce J.M.Pettegrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence* p.70-78,p.100.
[53]*India Today,* 15 January,1991.
[54]The method of recruitment was based on traditional associations of kin and friendship.
[55]The way in which the decentralised organizational structure of the guerrilla groups resulted in civilian casualties is described in Joyce

local power base and in the process many of them accrued considerable financial assets. This suggests the economic context of the guerrilla movement. Another factor which propelled the guerrillas to seek self-limited goals through violence was the failure of the prevailing institutional structures, both modern as well as customary, to provide them a measure of power.

Another noteworthy feature of the movement is that the rural population of the province sought the intervention of militants to settle disputes, primarily land disputes, and render justice. In many areas the militants instituted Khalsa panchayats, running parallel to government courts. This indicates the disenchantment of the masses with the prevailing institutional structure of India. At this stage, many Sikh youths were drawn into the movement by the Robin Hood image and the glorification of slain activists.

Our attention thus far has been focused on the growth of the guerrilla movement. We have examined the burgeoning of armed resistance in the countryside and its fallout on rural society.[56] Being socially and economically vulnerable, the rural population became soft targets and victims of both state and guerrilla violence. But the viability of the guerrilla movement depended on the co-operation of the local population to provide them

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J.M.Pettegrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence* pp.89-90,98.

[56]Evidence and description of atrocities on civilians are attested in reports presented by Amnesty International. See reports of Amnesty International 1988, *India: Review of Human Rights Violations*, London. Amnesty International 1989, *India: Some Recent Reports of Disappearances*, London, Amnesty International 1991, *India: Human Rights Violations in Punjab: Use and Abuse of the Law*, London, Amnesty International 1992, *India: Torture, Rape and Deaths in Custody*, London. Everyday forms of state repression are detailed in the work of Joyce J.M.Pettegrew, based on case studies of typical happennings of harrassment and torture involving the rural population. See Joyce J.M.Pettegrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*,pp.10-29,pp.68-69,pp.110-133.

with food, shelter and a safe hideout. Thus, the withdrawal of support to the guerrillas by the rural population was a decisive factor in determining the course of the movement. Other factors such as the lack of institutional means to coordinate guerrilla activities and the failure to establish a mass base also contributed to the disintegration of the movement.

The first phase of the guerrilla movement evoked a sympathetic response from the Sikh professional classes - teachers, doctors, engineers and lawyers. Their response, however, was not manifested in an overt political form. Many Sikh professionals and those in bureaucratic employment reiterated the fear of state repression as a key factor that prevented them from getting involved in a political protest. Moreover, several Sikh professionals believed that any confrontation with the central government would not only ruin their prospect of social promotion but would also put their jobs in jeopardy. Thus, many strings tied the Sikh bourgeoisie to the central government. These institutional ties were critical in preventing the guerrilla activists from finding its allies among the Sikh bourgeoisie.

The handful of discontented Sikh professionals who overtly protested against government actions included one retired Justice, two retired army generals, two serving officers with the Indian Civil Service. 'Of the politically committed cadres involved with the KCF, none save two came from families of status.'[57] The second phase of the guerrilla movement was marked by an outburst of violence which antagonised the liberal minded.

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[57]Joyce J.M.Pettegrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*,p.56.The two activists of KCF belonging to well placed families were, Dr.Sohan Singh a former director of health services, who raised the issue of Khalistan in 1986 and Daljit Singh Bittoo, a postgraduate student at the Punjab Agricultural University at Ludhiana where his father was a professor.

On 15 June 1991, seventy-four Hindus were killed in cold blood in a bizarre train massacre and on 10 March 1992, in a similar incident, sixty people were massacred. Attempts were made to dissuade the masses from participating in democratic procedures and in the run-up to the aborted Punjab Assembly elections June 1991, thirty two candidates were assassinated. Thus, the tactics and activities of the guerrillas lost their ideological credibility among a broad mass of the Sikh population.

Moreover, the central government rendered political groups ineffective by creating divisions through incarceration or harassment. Simranjit Singh Mann, a former officer in the prestigious Indian Police Service (IPS) tendered his resignation in protest against the assault on Darbar Sahib.[58]Thereafter, he was dismissed from service and charged with treason and waging war against the Indian state and for inciting a Sikh rebellion in the Indian armed forces. He was among the few Sikhs from his social background to share with the guerrillas the experience of torture and psychological degradation during detention. In November 1989, he won a massive majority in the Punjab elections and on 26 December 1990, all the major factions of the Akali Dal united under his leadership to form the Shiromani, or 'united' Akali Dal. Although within four months of its formation, the Shiromani Akali Dal fragmented into various factions, at present, Simranjit Singh Mann remains its President. The political goal of the Shiromani Akali Dal is to claim the right to self determination for the Sikhs. The central government regards it as a militant

[58]Simranjit Singh Mann hails from a distinguished Jat Sikh family. His grandfather was conferred an OBE by the British and his father, Sardar Joginder Singh had been an honorary colonel in the British army and an MBE. His father was also a member of the Legislative Council of the United Punjab. He has associations with the erstwhile Sikh aristocracy through his wife, whose sister is married to the Maharaja of Patiala.

party and many of its workers have been incarcerated, harassed and killed. It is perhaps the only political party to have preserved and documented the activity of para military forces in the province.[59] At one level, the party attempts to highlight the Sikh case and elicit support to seek self determination for the Sikhs at an international level, and at the local level its workers and activists are in direct contact with the activities of the guerrillas.[60]Also, the Shiromani Akali Dal is closely associated with the DamDami Taksal. Although the President of the Shiromani Akali Dal is widely regarded as a man of commitment and integrity, his party has not been successful in securing mass support.

The nature of political organization in the province is critical in determining the electoral pattern. Following the assassination of Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, the prominent Akali leaders before Operation Bluestar were discredited by the Sikh masses. However, the traditional Akali Dal has been successfully resurrected under the leadership of Parkash Singh Bad al and is now referred to as Akali Dal (B). The Akali Dal (B) has considerable control over the resources of the SGPC. The Punjab state assembly elections in February 1992, were boycotted by all the major political parties in the province. The Congress won 8 per cent of the popular vote and formed the state government. By 1992, the guerrilla network was believed to have been virtually eradicated. However, on 31 August 1995, the chief minister of Punjab was killed by a suicidal human bomb, who was reported to be an activist of the Babbar Khalsa, a guerrilla organisation with links abroad.

[59]It is appropriate to note that the SGPC and the Akali Dal have not preserved the bulk of their historical records.

[60]The President of Shiromani Akali Dal, maintains extensive correspondence and contact with various organisations of the United Nations and other International Human Rights Organisations.

As the state gears up for the nation-wide assembly elections in 1996, the contest is expected to be between the Akali Dal (B) and the Congress party. While the Akali Dal has the vital resources of the SGPC, the Congress party has the resources of the state and central government at its disposal.

The Sikh Diaspora

So far in this chapter we have examined the growth of Sikh national consciousness and the rise of an armed resistance for the formation of a separate Sikh state in the 1980s. The movement for the formation of an independent Sikh state of Khalistan has also found support from the large Sikh expatriate community. Recent estimates suggest that out of 18 million Sikhs, nearly 2 million live outside India and of 3,000 gurudwaras, almost 500 are situated outside India. By the mid 1980s, the Sikh community in England was by far the largest, estimated to be nearly 300,000, followed by the Canadian Sikh community numbering between 120,000 and 200,000 and over 125,000 Sikhs were estimated to be living in the United States. Moreover, the majority of the Sikh emigrants have peasant origins. That is why an appraisal of the Sikh unrest must take into account the attitudes and activities of Sikhs based outside India.

In this section we will attempt to explain the role of the Sikh diaspora in the Sikh ethno-nationlaist movement. This entails a brief account of the process of emigration from rural Punjab. Although no scholar has covered the entire field, there are several historical accounts of Sikh settlement in different countries, with a focus on different aspects of this

emigration. The overseas Sikh emigration is a relatively recent phenomenon the first phase of which began in the early nineteenth century. Despite the severe adversaries and hostile surroundings encountered by the pioneer founders of overseas Sikh settlement, as well as their situation as emigrants where they started from the lowest layer of the industrial labour force, they have managed to achieve considerable prosperity like other upwardly mobile minorities.

Sikhs in England

The pioneer founders of Britain's Sikh settlement were Sikh soldiers who had fought in Europe during the First World War, and decided to stay back in Britain instead of boarding the troopships back to India. Most of the early pioneers belonged to the Jat caste, from which the Indian Army drew many of its recruits. They were soon joined by a different caste, the Bhatras, whose traditional occupation as peddlers enjoined them to deploy their traditional skills and work as peddlers, selling clothes and other goods from door to door, thereby establishing an occupational toe-hold in Britain. During the 1930s the inflow of Sikh migrants grew steadily through the process of chain migration. The onset of the post-war economic boom, transformed the pattern of opportunities to the Sikh immigrants. Since British industry was acutely short of labour force, there was a shift from peddling to industrial employment and the Sikh immigrants increasingly became part of the industrial labour force. By the early 1960s there was an ever increasing inflow of migrant workers from Punjab until the imposition of immigration controls in 1962.

Throughout the 1970s there was a constant inflow of Sikh settlers from East Africa. The Sikh emigration to East Africa had begun in the late nineteenth century. The

early Sikh pioneers to East Africa belonged to the Ramgarhia caste, whose traditional occupation as artisans ascribed to them a relatively low social status. They were recruited by the British colonial authorities as construction workers, using their traditional skills in bricklaying and carpentry, to lay railway lines in Nairobi. Many East African Sikhs steadily squeezed into positions of dominance in trade and industry. But soon after many colonised African countries attained independence, employment opportunities for East African Sikhs dwindled or were curtailed. The Indian community was viewed almost as colonialists and for many Africans it became a mission to reclaim command of the economic sphere of their country, from the supposed stranglehold of the Indians. As a consequence, many East African Sikhs migrated to Britain, since some of them already held British passports. Out of the 300,000 Sikhs living in Britain at present, more than half are Jats.62

The outset of industrial recession during the 1980s resulted in shrinkage of opportunities in the waged labour market, and according to one estimate, 'as many as half of all middle-aged Asian industrial workers had lost their jobs'.63The imminent collapse of the labour market has prompted many Asian industrial workers to search for alternative means of making a living. This has prompted more and more redundant Sikh industrial workers to increasingly turn towards self-employment, together with small scale manufacturing. As we have seen, the first generation Sikh immigrants predominantly found employment in the waged labour market. However, because of the changes in

[62]Roger Ballard, 'Differentiation and Disjunction Among the Sikhs', in *Desh Pradesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, Roger Ballard (ed.), London, 1994, p.95.
[63]Ibid., p.100.

occupational and economic situation, the second generation British Sikhs are steadily becoming more middle class.

The political activities of early Sikh settlers were centered around promoting their interests as an industrial labour force. Many of the Sikh industrial workers, especially the Jat Sikhs, had links with the Communist Party of India. During the late 1950s and early 1960s Indian Workers' Associations (IWAs) were instituted in many industrial towns to articulate workers' grievances and to challenge the subordinate position in the labour market. Membership of the IWAs was confined overwhelmingly to Jat Sikhs.64 Moreover, it is critical to note that this egalitarian orientation reflected as much a commitment to Sikhism as to socialism. That is why local gurudwaras provided a vital arena for social and industrial solidarity. Despite the success of IWAs in challenging the marginalisation of Punjabi industrial workers, there has been a gradual decline in the once thriving network of IWAs. Further, the outset of industrial recession has contributed to the collapse of the IWAs by the 1980s.

It was only after the turbulent events of 1984 that the attitude of the British Sikh community underwent a transformation. Thereafter, the movement for the formation of an independent Sikh state of Khalistan found vociferous support among the British Sikh community, although earlier in September 1971, Jagjit Singh Chauhan, a former minister in an Akali government had announced the formation of a sovereign Sikh state of Khalistan in a press statement issued in London. It was only after 1984 that many Sikh

[64] For further details, see John DeWitt, *Indian Workers Associations in Great Britain*, Oxford University Press, 1969.

organizations abroad, such as the Dal Khalsa and the Babbar Khalsa, canvassed support from the expatriate Sikh community in Canada, the United States, Germany and Great Britain. Many Sikh guerrilla organisations maintain international political wings involving politically active expatriate Sikhs. Since they are unresponsive to local conditions they engage in hatching long term strategy for the Sikh struggle.65 They maintain contacts with Human Rights organizations in Punjab and human rights cases are frequently taken up through the Sikh Human Rights Internet, together with Amnesty International. These organisations also berate and lobby support for the Sikh cause in the United Nations. Thus, we see that serious violations of human rights no longer fall within the purview of internal affairs of the state and further influences relations among states. The Indian intelligence service has attempted to curb the activities of various Sikh individuals and organizations based outside India through propaganda and subversive activities.

Sikh Emigration to Canada and the United States

Among the early Indian settlers in Canada were Sikh ex-soldiers who had participated in Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee celebration in Canada's British Columbia. Within a few years a large number of Sikh immigrants settled along the west coast of Canada and by 1908 there were 6,500 Sikh workers in British Columbia. Most of them found employment as lumbermen, miners or were engaged in building railroads. In a bid to stop further Indian immigration in Canada, the Canadian government enforced a number of restrictive immigration measures enacted through legislations. In 1910 a legislation was passed severely restricting Asian immigration into the country. Stricter immigration

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[65] Many leaders of KCF reside in London.

control in Canada resulted in an increase in the number of immigrants to the United States. By 1910, nearly six thousand Indians had moved southwards to California's Sacramento and San Joaquin river delta lands, where they found employment as farmhands or as labourers.

The response of the older immigrants from north western Europe to the newly arrived Sikh immigrants to North America was hostile and unwelcome. A high level of prejudice was evident in public policies as well as the attitudes of white Americans. In 1907 there was an outbreak of anti-Asian riots in British Columbia and in 1908, riots directed against Asian immigrants of Indian, Chinese and Japanese origin broke out in California. In fact, the history of immigration to the United States is a stain on the world wide projection of the national myth of the immigrant state of America as the melting pot. The descendants of the earlier settlers to North America, particularly those who shared a common Nordic or Teutonic ancestry projected the notion of ethnic purity in order to protect their interests from oriental incursions. Nevertheless, the mistreatment of expatriates abroad became a major issue with significant international ramifications.

What impelled the Sikh peasants to seek livelihood in overseas countries? In 1907, there was widespread agrarian unrest in Punjab. The immediate cause of the rural dissent in Punjab was the promulgation of the British land rights legislation which was a final blow to an already disaffected Sikh peasantry. It was for the first time that the rural population, pensioned government servants and retired army men, the section of the population known for its staunch loyalty to the government led a series of anti government campaigns. Remarkably, Sikh immigration into Canada and United States was at a peak between 1907

and 1910. Thus, the economic and social conditions in Punjab to seek alternate means of livelihood, encouraged immigration.

The Ghadr uprising

The vast majority of Indian immigrants to North America were Sikhs. Not surprisingly, Sikh organizations were instituted to coordinate the activities of the immigrants. The Khalsa Diwan Society was founded in 1907 at Vancouver and initially its activities centered around religious and educational concerns. However, issues such as the growing racial discrimination and anti-immigration laws soon began to dominate its proceedings. A large number of Sikh immigrants were ex-soldiers eliciting loyalty to the British Raj.66 Attempts to redress their grievances, such as racial discrimination and laws preventing wives and families to join their husbands through petitions to British administrators proved unsuccessful. Thus attempts by Sikh immigrants to seek protection and justice from the British government were seldom rewarded.

Another dimension was added to the activities of the Indian immigrants in North America through the founding of a revolutionary organization, the Hindustani Workers of the Pacific Coast at San Francisco. In November 1913, it published the first issue of a weekly paper called the Ghadr ['revolution'] and thereafter the organization came to be known as the Ghadr party. The primary objective of the Ghadr party was to liberate India and overthrow the colonial regime through a revolution in India. Thus, the overseas Sikh

[66]According to one estimate seventy five per cent of the immigrants had served in the British army. See Mark Juergensmeyer in 'The Ghadar Syndrome:Immigrant Sikhs and Nationalist Pride' in *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition*, Mark Juergensmeyer and N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), 1979, Berkeley Religious Studies Series, p.178.

population were pioneers to espouse the nationalist cause for India's freedom from British colonialism. The Ghadr uprising sought to address the political situation in India and is significant in India's struggle for independence. 67

The Komagata Maru incident brought world attention to the plight of Sikh immigrants and perpetuated the seeds of revolutionary nationalism. In May 1914, SS Komagata Maru, a Japanese passenger ship carrying 346 prospective Sikh immigrants attempted to circumvent Canadian immigration regulations which stipulated that prospective immigrants must travel directly from their home country to Canada. This provision was clearly directed at stopping further Indian immigration since there were no ships sailing directly from India to Canada. Despite vigorous public campaigns in Canada as well as in India, and appeals to the Canadian government and the Viceroy of India, the Canadian government did not allow the vessel to land. Sir Richard MacBride, the prime minister of British Columbia stated, 'To admit Orientals in large numbers would mean in the end the extinction of the white peoples and we have always in mind the necessity of keeping this a white man's country.'68The plight of the passengers many of whom had put at stake all their possessions on this venture elicited considerable sympathy from the people of Punjab and provided a forum for the dissemination of Ghadr propaganda. As the ship approached the port city of Calcutta in India in September 1914, a strong police contingent ordered the Sikh passengers to immediately board a train to Punjab. The Sikhs

[67]In a major study, Hugh Tinker (1974) has argued that Britain lost the Raj mainly because of the way the overseas Indian community was treated. See Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery,* Oxford University Press, London, 1974, p.xv.

[68]Quoted in Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol.2, p.179.

refused to obey and in the ensuing fracas eighteen passengers were killed, twenty-five wounded and more then two hundred were interned.69 A campaign was mounted to whip up support in India. The experience of Sikh immigrants in North America had a significant impact on events in Punjab. Accounts of harsh treatment and fierce racial discrimination accorded to the overseas Sikhs elicited considerable sympathy in Punjab. The British government was accused of not protecting the interests of its subjects abroad from the hostile policies and actions of the Canadian and American authorities.

Although the Ghadr cause was aborted, it had significant international ramifications and political significance in the decline of colonialism. Mark Juergensmeyer (1979) distinguishes two phases of the Ghadr movement. In its first phase, between 1913 and 1918, ties to the homeland were cast in the nationalist political rhetoric. In the second phase, between 1916 and 1919, the Ghadr ideology blossomed into a socialist ideology, with focus on issues of economic exploitation and class differentiation.70So great was the influence of the Russian revolution on Ghadr ideologues that many visited Russia to generate links with international communism. The question then arises, why did the immigrant Sikh community identify itself with the nationalist struggle for India's freedom? Further, why was a socialist rebellion resurrected to overthrow the colonial regime in India? Space precludes adequate treatment but a skeletal treatment of some of the issues is

[69]Ibid., p.181.

[70]The international connections of the Ghadr Party are described by Gail Omevedt in 'Armed Struggle in India: The Ghadar Party', *Frontier*, 9 November 1974 and 16 November 1974. The links between the Ghadr Party and the Communist party in Punjab are described by Tilak Raj Chadha, 'Punjab's Red and White Communists: Scramble for Funds from America', *Thought*, 14 June 1952.

offered below. Clearly, the Ghadr uprising received widespread support from the immigrant Sikh community in North America. This segment of the population was predominantly employed in low status menial jobs on plantations, in mines, as labourers in building railroads and other transportation infrastructure. In an attempt to relate the Ghadr uprising against British colonialism in India to the oppression experienced by the Sikh immigrant community in North America, Mark Juergensmeyer notes, 'a militant nationalist movement is created abroad by expatriates, for whom the movement is also an outlet for their economic and social frustration, and a vehicle for their ethnic identities.'71Mark Juergensmeyer further notes that Ghadr nationalism instilled a sense of nationalist Indian pride in the immigrant community to stand up to the hostile environment in North America. Certainly, the violent prejudices that the first generation immigrant Sikh community experienced in North America contributed in raising their political consciousness. Thus, the Ghadr uprising was an endeavor to protect themselves and deal effectively with the authorities in North America, by assuming control of their country of origin.

From Ghadr to Khalistan

How do we explain the transformation from Indian nationalism to Sikh nationalism among the Sikh diaspora in North America? An attempt to answer the above question is bedeviled by two issues. The first concerns the use of the term 'diaspora' for the expatriate Sikh community. If we adopt Walker Connor's influential definition of diaspora as 'that

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[71]Mark Juergensmeyer in 'The Ghadar Syndrome:Immigrant Sikhs and Nationalist Pride' in *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition*, Mark Juergensmeyer and N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), 1979, Berkeley Religious Studies Series, p.189.

segment of a people living outside the homeland',72and ethnic 'homeland' designating the emotional dimension and attachment to the home of the forebears (imagined or real), then is it appropriate to talk of a Sikh diaspora prior to the conception of a Sikh homeland? Although a feeble demand for a Sikh state was made for the first time in the 1940s, the expression of Punjab as a homeland for the Sikhs was only woven into the self-definitions as late as the 1960s. Further, the movement for a separate Sikh state gained momentum only in the 1980s. Even so, the Sikh diaspora began to promote the formation of a sovereign Sikh national state of Khalistan only after the cataclysmic events of 1984.

Various explanations have been offered to explain the support for Khalistan by the Sikh diaspora. Some explanations emphasize the psychological aspects of the migrants' experience, the alienation and anomie generated by the experience of living in a strange country, which are believed to heighten the religious and national identity of a migrant community, promoting the desire to form a homeland state.73 But is the diasporan Sikh community lonelier and more insecure than the nonseparatist migrant groups? Why did this sense of alienation provide support for India's quest for freedom from colonialism and it was only after 1984 that it shifted into support for the formation of an independent Sikh state?

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[72]Walker Conner, 'The Impact of Homelands upon Diasporas' in *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, Gabriel Shaffer (ed.), London, 1986, p.16.

[73]See for instance Arthur Helweg's, 'Sikh Politics in India: The Emigrant Factor' in Gerald N. Barrier and Verne A. Dusenbery (ed.) *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and the Experience Beyond Punjab*, Columbia, 1989, pp. 305-336. A similar approach emphasising the psychological and cultural aspects of the migrants experience in giving rise to the demands of independence of the homeland in the case of Britain is presented by Harry Goulbourne, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Post-Imperial Britain*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp.126-169.

In a recent article, Verne A. Dusenbery has argued that 'one of the appeals of Khalistan to diasporan Sikhs may be the creation of a publicly recognised "country of origin", from which Sikhs may legitimately make claim to their own political voice and to the prerequisites of public support for cultural diversity (e.g., funding made available under multiculturalism programs or protection under local human rights codes) in their countries of residence.'74If the Sikh diaspora has pressed claims for a Sikh national state in order to gain a measure of power and credibility in the country of immigration, then why have they done so only since 1984? Verne A.Dusenbery's account is based on the impact of the multiculturalism policies of the Canadian government (1971) on the Sikh diaspora. But then how do we account for the widespread support for the Khalistan movement by the Sikhs based in America and in Europe? Moreover, Dusenbery does not empirically validate his claim that it is the second and the third generation North American Sikhs who support the movement for Sikh sovereignty.

The overseas Sikh community has historically maintained strong ties through kinship and culture to Punjab.75Traditional intellectuals(gianis, dhadhis), holy men (bhais, sants, babas) and religious musicians regularly tour gurudwaras world wide to provide spiritual enhancement. They continue to be the bearers of Sikh tradition with their ability to interpret and expound on gurbani (the holy word of the Sikh gurus). Moreover, popular

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[74]Verne A.Dusenbery, 'A Sikh Diaspora? Contested Identities and Constructed Realities', in *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*, Peter van der Veer (ed.), 1995, p.33.

[75]Cultural associations are developed through the entertainment industry. Classical and popular performers, folk artists, film stars are invited by the Sikh diaspora. In fact, London has become an important centre for the Punjabi music industry. In recent years, Punjabi music has assumed great popularity among the second and third generation Punjabi immigrants.

and classical performers are invited by the Sikh migrants to perform shows on a regular basis. London has become the hub of popular Punjabi folk music in recent years. In fact, it is the music tie that to some extent binds the second and third generation overseas Sikh youths culturally to Punjab. Further, rural Punjab has been the source of spouses for the Sikh migrant group, as spouses from Punjab are believed to be of higher moral character and therefore pure. Moreover, the development of air travel, efficient telephone services, satellite television transmitting instant regional news has facilitated the intense communication Sikh emigrants have with their homeland.

. Apart from the growth of cultural and social ties, the Sikh emigrants have a flourishing economic network with their ethnic homeland. A study indicates that for Punjab, the highest proportion of expatriates money came from Great Britain until 1978.76The reason was obvious enough, a large Punjabi population resided in the UK. Remittances to needy parents and relatives are of increasing importance. Further, remittances for conspicuous consumption are significant in altering one's family position in the social hierarchy. The recent policy of economic liberalisation has thrown the Indian economy open to foreign investors. The Punjab government is inviting and giving incentives to the overseas Punjabi community in order to encourage investments. However, these economic policies are too recent to allow for proper evaluation.

This excursion into the nature of ties that bind the Sikh migrant group to their ethnic homeland is sufficient, I hope, to indicate how the nature of the ties between the

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[76]Arthur W.Helweg, 'The Indian Diaspora: Influence on International Relations' in Gabriel Sheffer (ed.), *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, London, 1986, p.119.

migrant group and the country of its forebears is critical in determining the response of the diaspora community to the political and social events in their ethnic homeland. These links are particularly significant for migrant groups who constitute a minority in the country of emigration. In the case of the Sikhs, it is evident that the strong family and village ties, together with the cultural and economic ties bind the expatriate Sikhs to their homeland. These ties are critical in determining the response of the Sikh emigrants to the policies of the Indian government and the treatment meted out to the Sikhs in India. It is in this context that the overseas Sikh community shifted its support to the Sikh movement for a sovereign state after the attack on the Sikh holy shrine in 1984.

Conclusion

In the first section of this chapter we have examined how the Punjabi *suba* movement consolidated the process of religion based linguistic differentiation. We noted that modern institutions facilitated both inter-communal collaboration and communal political competition. Further, the Punjabi *suba* movement demonstrates that the response of the central government to regional demands is critical in determining the course of a regional movement. On the one hand, the Indian government perceived the demand for Punjabi *suba* as a threat to the principles of secular India. On the other hand, the Akali Dal sought to protect Sikh language and religion in a Hindu dominated society and accused the central government of pursuing a political strategy of assimilating the language and culture of a minority group. More importantly, the concept of Punjab as a homeland for the Sikhs was woven into Sikh self-definitions since the Punjabi *suba* movement.

In the second section of this chapter, we have attempted to delineate the factors which turned a peaceful, farmers movement, concerned with specific socio-economic issues into a violent guerrilla movement for national independence. The first stirrings of the Sikh discontent began chiefly with the moderate demands of well-to-do peasants and progressively turned more radical. Our attention has been focused on two factors which contributed to this radicalisation. First, the enormous impact of the policies and activities of the central government on Sikh communal perception. Second, the tendency of Sikh peasantry to turn to religious notions emanating from Sikh faith in legitimising their economic, political and social grievances. Clearly, the demands of the Akali Dal have been shaped by a desire to safeguard and promote an independent Sikh entity. It is critical to note that the vigorous Akali campaign has never construed the Anandpur Sahib Resolution as a demand for an independent Sikh state. The political objective of the Akali Dal has been to strive for the creation of a *desh-kaal*, literally meaning country and era for the Sikhs within the Indian union.[77] We noted that the traditional Akali leadership, drawn from the dominant social and economic strata, is strongly amalgamated with the prevailing political and economic structure to ever support the demand for a sovereign Sikh state.

Further, Sikh political campaigns have historically been staged around Sikh shrines. Religious shrines are material embodiments of the deeply held systems of life and thought of a community. The distinctive imagery of sacred shrines bind the community of believers through a shared cosmological understanding. The *gurudwara* agitation (1920-1925) established a pattern of peaceful resistance that has been resurrected by the Akali

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[77] See Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*, p.221.

Dal from time to time. The Akali campaigns have often been based on the holding of ostensibly religious *diwans*, or 'assemblies' often in the precincts of Sikh *gurudwaras*. The campaigns have been conducted in a shroud of powerful religious and historical symbolism. Each Akali *jatha* would first of all go through a holy rite and invoke the blessings of the *sangat*, or 'religious congregation' and the Adi Granth before setting off. Such rites express a sense of collective identity and the repetitive and stylized form of these rituals nurtures a sense of order and security among its adherents. That is why the assault on Darbar Sahib, the bastion of Sikhism, in June 1984 became a powerful symbol of official repression and provoked a sense of alienation and deep anguish among the Sikhs and led to the radicalization of the Sikh diaspora.

Thus, the growing Sikh unrest in Punjab was due to the intransigence of the central government in conceding the seemingly legitimate demands of the Akali Dal. In the early phase, the existence of Akali Dal as a powerful ethnoregional party served to institutionalize potential conflict emanating from the ethnoregion of Punjab. But the failure to seek an equitable solution to the moderate demands of the Akali Dal and the ruthless use of the repressive apparatus of the state against the Sikh minority was partly responsible in giving rise to the Sikh armed struggle. Thus, the Sikh insurrecton became more radical as it developed due to the growing acrimony between the Akali Dal and the central government.

The exploited Sikh peasantry constituted the vanguard of the struggle for Sikh national independence. The growing discontent on the part of the peasantry was rooted in the prevailing material conditions of their existence. Nonetheless, it was official repression

that impelled the aggrieved peasantry into an ethno-regional armed struggle. Once the Sikh peasants had become stirred up, a violent overhaul of the society seemed underway. But by themselves peasant insurrections have a historic record of failure. More importantly, the participation of the rural Sikh population and the Sikh bourgeois was critical in determining the outcome of the guerrilla movement. The particular stage of industrial development in the province precluded a fusion between the bourgeois and the peasantry. The lack of tacit support for guerrilla resistance by a broad cross-section of the rural and the urban Sikh population led to the virtual disintegration of the movement. Another factor which contributed to the failure of the movement was the lack of proper organizational structure to coordinate the activities of the guerrilla cadres. Thus, whether or not a peasant led ethno-nationalist struggle becomes politically effective depends on its success in finding allies with other strata of the population. This in turn depends on the stage of economic development of the country and specific historical circumstances within which an ethno-regional movement emerges.

5
Agrarian Crisis and the Rise of Armed Resistance: The socio-economic impact of the Green Revolution

I have so far discussed the transition of the Sikh congregation into an ethnic community (in chapter 3) and then into a nation demanding a state of its own (in chapter 4). I now turn to the latest phase of the Sikh nationalist movement and its demand for Khalistan. This involves an understanding of how two aspects of social change in the last half of this century have come together. The first of these is the Green Revolution and its radicalization of a section of the Sikh peasantry who spearheaded the ethno-nationalist movement. The second concerns the rise and impact of the vernacular press. In this chapter I deal with the Green Revolution and the social composition of the Sikh nationalist movement; in the next chapter I consider the revolution in communication which spread the ideals of religion to wider sections of the population.

Our explanation of the emergence of Sikh ethno-nationalism in the late 1970s and its development up to the present time focusses on the socio-economic impact of Green Revolution strategy as an agent of change on the Sikh peasantry. The central task of this chapter is to bring into focus the nexus between the dislocation and alienation experienced by a section of the Sikh peasantry as a consequence of the green revolution and the subsequent demand for a sovereign Sikh state.

In order fully to comprehend the complex processes of social change initiated or accelerated by the technologies and policies associated with green revolution strategy, we must first understand the agricultural system which is being changed, then discern the process of change, and finally ask where the change is leading. The main focus of the chapter is on what happens to the social structure of the rural society as the processes of technological change proceed. The chapter is broadly divided into three sections. Section

one comprises of three parts, the first part examines the origins of the green revolution, this is followed by an exploration of the consequences of the green revolution on agrarian social structure. The third part describes the subsequent emergence of Sikh activists and establishes their socio-economic background. Section two looks at the situations which favour a peasant led ethno-regional struggle as a consequence of the transition to commercial agriculture. Finally, the process of overseas Sikh emigration from rural Punjab is explored.

I

In this section we will consider four questions that lie at the heart of the debate on how agricultural change affects agrarian social structure and vice-versa in India. These are:

1. What is the green revolution?
2. Was the new technology designed for the best endowed region and for the most affluent section of the society?
3. How has the green revolution transformed Punjab into 'the granary of India'?
4. Did the green revolution result in complete depeasantisation?[1]

What is the Green Revolution?

The term 'green revolution' came into use in the late 1960s to refer to the introduction of higher-yielding varieties (HYVs) of wheat and rice in 'developing' countries. Andrew Pearse (1974), director of a major United Nations research project into

[1]By `depeasantisation' is meant 'the separation of peasants from the land and the means of production', T.Byres, *The Green Revolution in India*, The Open University Press, 1982,p. 41.

agricultural change, identifies three distinct ways in which the phrase 'green revolution' is used.

1. *The Green revolution as a breakthrough in plant breeding*

The term 'green revolution' is understood, particularly by agricultural scientists, as a scientific breakthrough for creating new varieties of cereals, particularly rice and wheat. It was believed that the use of the 'new seeds' would lead to a revolutionary increase in agricultural productivity.

2. *Green revolution as a technology*

The high yielding potential of the new varieties of grain could be realized only through doses of chemical fertiliser and controlled irrigation. Agronomists and agricultural economists employed the term for the new technology which required agricultural mechanization such as tractors and grain-processing machinery.

3. *Green revolution as a development strategy*

The phrase, green revolution implies not only a technology but also a type of strategy used to execute it. [2] New breakthroughs in agricultural technology could represent social and political solutions to the agrarian problem in the developing countries. Through the transformation of productive technology production may be intensified and yields raised, especially in the countries where agricultural land is limited. This further implied that the green revolution could potentially provide a technical solution to a social problem, as

[2]Warning of the political and ideological implications of the green revolution, Francine Frankel notes, 'Agriculture, it suggests, is being peacefully transformed through the quiet workings of science and technology, reaping the economic gains of modernisation while avoiding the social costs of mass upheaval and disorder usually associated with rapid change.' Francine Frankel, *India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs*, Princeton University Press, 1971, preface.

profound social upheaval of land reform could be evaded through new technology.[3] As John Harriss points out, 'this peaceful rational solution to the agrarian question through new technology was counterpoised to the threat of a 'red revolution', which could now be averted. The expression was deliberately coined to contrast with the phrase 'red revolution', and the notion that 'developing' countries were to undergo far-reaching changes as a result of an agricultural revolution, rather than because of radical political transformation. The strategic, geopolitical interests of the United States in changing rural social and economic conditions in Asia and Latin America, with a view to the containment of communist expansion, were clear.'[4] Thus the green revolution was seized on readily by development experts as the panacea they had been searching for.

In 1953, John D. Rockefeller III founded the Agricultural Development Council in America to impart knowledge and skills needed to transfer and implement the American model of agricultural expansion to agricultural scientists from other countries, especially Asia. Three groups of International Agencies were involved in organizing, funding and transferring the American model of agriculture to India - the private American Foundations, the American Government and the World Bank.

Is the Green Revolution a 'Scale Neutral' or 'Resource Neutral' Technology?

In order to achieve high yields the new varieties required high fertilizer inputs, principally chemical fertilizers, and a vast water supply. Thus, the successful use of the HYVs required the adoption of what came to be called a 'package' of inputs (new seeds,

[3] K.B.Hadjor, *Dictionary of Third World Terms*, Penguin, 1993, p. 134.
[4] J.Harriss, 'Capitalism and Peasant Production: The green revolution in India', in *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, T. Shanin (ed.),Oxford, 1987, pp. 229-230.

fertilizers and agro-chemicals) and cultivation practices (controlled irrigation and more systematic planting). The use of the HYV package brought with it an increased demand for capital, and developed market structures to handle both increased inputs and output. There is widespread evidence that although the new technology may theoretically be 'scale neutral' it was certainly not 'resource neutral', for the reasons outlined above. (Harriss 1987, Byres 1983, Rao 1975)

The idea that the green revolution is heavily dependent on the capital intensive products of agribusiness and, therefore, it can only benefit the larger, more prosperous farmers is influential (Frankel 1971, Byres 1972, Patnaik 1976, Shiva 1991). More specifically, in the case of Punjab there is exhaustive evidence that the introduction of the green revolution led to a significant increase in both food production and landlessness (Hadjor 1993:135, Dasgupta 1977, Bhalla 1972). Likewise, Khushwant Singh concludes,

> As farming got more mechanised, landowners began to dispense with farm hands: what had been for generations a familial patron-client association turned into an adversarial one. Rich landlords became richer, the marginal became poor; and the landless unwanted on land.[5]

Considerable effort has been expended to illustrate how the green revolution aggravates socio-economic polarization, and adversely affects the lives of the already impoverished peasantry. This conception of capitalist development as entailing the differentiation of rural producers and `de-peasantisation' has been enormously influential despite contemporary and subsequent criticism. I shall examine the reasoning behind this judgement and the evidence for it, and explain by reference to material from micro-level studies of trends of agrarian change in Punjab, how and why the actual changes have been more complicated

[5]Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs* (second impression), vol.2, Oxford University Press, 1991, p.323.

and contradictory. It would be misleading to form generalizations regarding Punjab as a whole because of the internal regional and cultural diversity, therefore, I highlight cases where there are inter-regional contradictions within Punjab.[6]

The Green Revolution in Punjab

The following section describes the transformation of Punjab into the "granary of India" through the green revolution strategy. This is established through a survey of statistical data on the expansion of the following features: 1) fertiliser consumption 2) irrigation 3) electricity consumption 4) yields of rice and wheat 4) a comparison of per capita income with other states.

As mentioned already, in order to flower, the 'new seeds' required high fertiliser inputs and irrigation occupied a key position in the package. Therefore, the 'new strategy' could apply only to those parts of India where irrigation had spread or to which it might spread. Only 17 per cent of India's arable acreage was irrigated by the mid-1960s. Punjab has an ancient irrigation history and the green revolution merely expanded and intensified the existing irrigation system. In 1962, the Punjab Agricultural University (P.A.U.) was established at Ludhiana and became the epicentre of the green revolution in Punjab. It was here that the visiting Norwegian-American agro-scientist, Norman Borlaug,[7] and his team

[6]It is important to note that the Punjab province is further divided into twelve districts. The geographical area of Punjab is 5033 (000 hectares) and the population is 20,190,795, of which 70.28 per cent is rural and 29.72 is urban. Further, 36.93 per cent is Hindu and 60.75 per cent is Sikh (Statistical Abstract of Punjab, 1991-92).

[7]'Norman Ernest Borlaug (b.1914) micro-biologist of the University of Minnesota spent 14 years in Mexico at the Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre and several other universities and institutions before he came to Ludhiana. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1970' (*Singh,Khushwant* 1991:321).

of Indian scientists evolved new strains of Mexican dwarf wheat and passed the seed on to the farming community.

The technological innovations demanded large amounts of chemical fertilisers and controlled irrigation in Punjab. From 1965-66 to 1982-83, fertiliser consumption increased almost fifteen times and by 1991-92 Punjab province accounted for 10 per cent of total fertilizer consumption in India (*Agriculture in Punjab*, 1991-92, Department of Agriculture, Chandigarh, Punjab), (see table 2). Consumption of electricity in agriculture increased by more than six times (see table 5) , and the area irrigated by wells and tubewells more than doubled. By 1990-91, the area irrigated was ninety-three per cent of the net sown area (see tables 3 and 4).

Table 2

Consumption of Chemical Fertilizers in Punjab

Year	Fertilizers ('000 Nutrients tonnes)
1960-61	5
1970-71	213
1975-76	295
1980-81	295
1985-86	1098
1987-88	1112
1988-89	1117
1989-90	1145
1990-91	1221
1991-92	1262

* Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab,1992.

Table 3

Net Irrigated Area in Punjab

Year	Government Canals	Private Canals	Tubewells and Canals	Other Sources	Total	Percentage of net area Irrigated to net Area Sown
1960-61	1,173	7	829	11	2,020	54
1970-71	1,286	6	1,591	5	2,888	71
1975-76	1,366	4	1,742	7	3,119	75
1980-81	1,430	-	1,939	13	3,382	81
1985-86	1,412	-	2,274	4	3,690	88
1987-88	1,409	6	2,307	2	3,724	89
1988-89	1,452	6	2,309	9	3,776	90
1989-90	1,460	7	2,436	16	3,919	93
1990-91	1,567	9	2,233	7	3,816	90
1991-92	1,510	9	2,423	4	3,946	93

* Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab,1992.

Table 4

Irrigated Area in Punjab (1991-92)

	(000 hectares.)
Canals	1559
Tubewells	2339
Total	3910
Percentage Irrigated Area	93

* Source: Agriculture in Punjab 1991-92, Department of Agriculture, Chandigarh, Punjab.

Table 5

Consumption of Electric Power in Agriculture as Percentage of Total Consumption

1970-71	1975-76	1980-81	1985-86	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
38.00	43.16	43.66	39.74	47.15	43.88	45.41	42.87	43.81

* Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab,1992.

Similarly, there was a tremendous increase in the use of agricultural implements and machinery. The number of tractors increased by eleven times and that of tubewells by

about thirteen times between 1966 and 1981. In 1991-92, there were nearly 275,000 tractors and 781,000 tubewells in Punjab.[8] According to one source, 'Punjab has 10 per cent of India's television sets and 17 per cent of its tractors'.[9]

The use of these inputs along with new HYV seeds, led to a swift growth of agricultural production in Punjab. Since the introduction of the new technology Punjab has earned the name of "food basket of the country" and "granary of India"; it has been contributing forty to fifty per cent of rice and sixty to seventy per cent of wheat to the central pool of India for the last two decades. Punjab State produces one per cent of rice, two percent of wheat and two percent of cotton of the world's output. (*Agriculture in Punjab 1991-92*, Department of Agriculture, Chandigarh, Punjab)

Table 6

The Production of Wheat and Rice in Punjab and India (Percentages)

Year	Punjab		India	
	Rice	Wheat	Rice	Wheat
1960-61	48.49	41.44	88.3	60.9
1965-66	61.82	45.58	78.1	57.6
1969-70	103.04	15.12	-	-
1971-72	194.37	133.65	-	-
1973-74	240.88	123.25	-	-
1975-76	305.75	137.69	124.7	159.9
1977-78	527.62	158.01	134.7	176.0
1979-80	644.89	187.20	107.9	175.0

* Source: Punjab Di Arthikta, 1983, Azad, Nirmal., Punjabi University Publication Bureau, Patiala, Punjab.

[8] Statistical Abstract of Punjab, 1991-92.

[9] Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India*, Melbourne, 1986, p. 27.

Table 7

Contribution to Central Pool (Percentage)

Year	Rice	Wheat
1970-71	16	74
1975-76	19	58
1980-81	45	75
1985-86	43	59
1986-87	47	62
1987-88	49	56
1988-89	41	73
1989-90	46	63
1990-91	43	61
1991-92	52	72

* Source: Agriculture in Punjab 1991-92, Department of Agriculture, Chandigarh, Punjab.

In terms of per capita income, Punjab had improved from fourth position among the highest income states in India in 1960-61 to first position in 1964-65. Since then Punjab has not only maintained its lead over other states in India but over the years the province has increased its margin in per capita income over other states in India.The state came to have a per capita income in 1985-86 which is more than double that of the all India average and more than three times that of Bihar, the lowest per capita income state in the country.[10] According to another source, 'the income of the "average Punjabi" was 65 per cent greater than that of the "average Indian".'[11] Increase in production was high particularly in wheat and rice. Wheat production rose by 4.8 times and that of rice by around 14 times from 1965-66 to 1982-83.

From the above data, it is evident that Punjab took the lead over other states in the use of almost all components of new agricultural technology and is to be seen as an island

[10] S.S.Gill, 'Migrant Labour in Rural Punjab', mimeo, National Commission on Rural Labour, Government of India, 1990, pp. 116-117.

[11] Quoted in Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India*, p. 27.

of prosperity in an otherwise backward country. Thus, any discussion on Sikh ethno-nationalism must take note of this significant background factor.

Agricultural Change and Agrarian Social Structure

1. Technology and the Small Peasant

This section will examine some of the factors which contributed to the emergence of the green revolution strategy in Punjab and its impact and repercussions on the prevailing agrarian social structure. Our aim is to show that fifteen years of the operation of green revolution enabled the formation of a social base for the Sikh ethno-nationalist movement through a radicalization of a section of the Sikh peasantry. I am in agreement with Andrew Pearse (1980), who maintains that on the one hand, the introduction of genetic-chemical technology is bound to cause major structural changes in society and on the other hand, variations in agrarian structure directly affect the mode of technology induced-economic and social transformation. The following discussion considers the consequences of the interaction between the two. I first examine how the existing farm size or the pattern of land holding affected the profitability arising from technological innovation. I then go on to discuss the implications of the new technology for local labour and the subsequent migration and occupational shifts it entailed.

Pattern of Land Holdings

In a landed society, the pattern of land ownership provides a guide to the concentration of power. Punjab is a highly stratified society, characterised by caste and class divisions. It is important to note that one is essentially dealing with the caste hierarchy

among Sikhs which is rather different from the classical Hindu fourfold caste hierarchy, in terms of *varnas* - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras, in that order of hierarchy - with the fifth category of Untouchable[12]. Moreover, this classical four-fold hierarchy is generally recognized by anthropologists to be a gross oversimplification, which fails to capture the complex reality of rural India.

Little information is available on the social characteristics of the big farmers or the small and marginal farmers of Punjab. Daniel Thorner (1976) does introduce a discussion about a new class of gentleman farmers emerging from ex-army officers, retired civil servants, other white collar jobs[13] and claims that this phenomenon is unique to India. [14]

Pearse(1980) also discusses the emergence of the new class of entrepreneurial cultivator as a consequence of the incorporation of the new technology. He cites Joshi(1971) who observes, that the profitability of the new technology has caused many people to choose to become cultivators who otherwise would not have done so. They consist of 'moneyed men from the business and professional classes, retired members of the

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[12]It is critical to note the relationship between caste background and the farm size ownership pattern. In the case of Punjab, all upper caste lessees and lessors are predominantly 'Jats'. According to Puri, 'Jats with 20 per cent of the Sikh population own 60 per cent of land', H.Puri, 'The Akali Agitation: An analysis of socio-economic bases of protest', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 Jan 1983, vol. 18, no.4, p.117.

[13]It is perhaps worth noting that the British inducted large numbers of Sikhs into the army. According to one source, in 1914 more than 47 per cent of the number of infantry units in the Indian army were composed of recruits from Punjab, 57 infantry units out of the total of 121 consisted of persons from Punjab in 1914, See B.Josh, *Communist Movement in Punjab*, New Delhi, 1979, p.18.

[14]'Typically (the superior right-holders) found it more profitable to rent out their land than to manage them personally.....this complex of legal, economic and social relations uniquely typical of Indian countryside served to produce an effect which I should like to call that of a built-in depressor', D.Thorner, *The Agrarian Prospect in India*, Allied, 1976, p.16. His ideas are developed by U. Patnaik, 'The Agrarian Question and Development of Capitalism in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1986, vol. 21, no. 18, pp. 781-93.

bureaucracy and the army, and influential and affluent politicians'.[15] Although it is probable that most of them come from landowning families.

There is no space to go into the historical details describing the existence of an inegalitarian social structure as reflected in the pattern of possession of the land holdings. I shall confine myself to the situation developing after the introduction of the green revolution strategy (see table 8).

Table 8

Classification of Land Holdings (in Hectares)

Size Class (ha.)	Number (000ha.)	Area (000ha.)
Below 1	296	164
1-2	204	328
2-4	289	842
4-10	261	1622
10 and above	67	1077
Total	1117	4033

* Source: Agriculture in Punjab 1991-92 , Department of Agriculture, Chandigarh, Punjab.

Agricultural census data reveals that between 1971 and 1981 there was a decline in operational holdings of 358,255. The number of holdings declined from 1,375,382 in 1971 to 1,027,127 in 1981. This is a decline of 25.3 per cent in the operational holdings in the decade. The whole of this decline is contributed by marginal and small holdings which declined respectively by 61.9 per cent and 23.3 per cent.[16] Dasgupta's study concludes that

[15] Cited in A. Pearse, *Seeds of Plenty, Seeds of Want: Social and Economic Implications of the Green Revolution*, Oxford, for United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1980, p.165.
[16] S.S.Gill, 'Changing Land Relations in Punjab and Implications for Land Reforms', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1989, vol. 24, no. 25, pp. A79-A85. A similar conclusion is drawn by P.S.Sandhu and S.S.Grewal, 'The Changing Land Holdings Structure in Punjab', *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 1987, vol. 42, no.3, pp. 294-300.

in Punjab 'the distribution of operated land has shifted in favour of the richer farmers under the new technology'.[17]

A word of caution is needed. On the basis of the above evidence it is tempting to draw an over-simplified picture of the green revolution strategy resulting in rural polarization and depeasantisation. Such a view obscures the complex processes at work as explained below.

John Harriss correctly notes that a simple survey of the indices of farm size may be misleading for an analysis of the process of social differentiation. He further explains that there is a good deal of evidence to posit that the shift in the distribution of the operated area in favour of rich peasants has not come about through the complete dispossession of poor peasants, but rather as a result of the reversion of land formerly tenanted by poor peasants and of 'reverse tenancy' under which small cultivators rent out land to bigger owners.[18] Further, there may be a significant range of variation in the rates of expansion. One preliminary micro-level study indicates that farms of the size group 20-25 acres expanded by 4 per cent whereas those of size group 100-150 acres increased by about 40 per cent.[19] It is interesting to note that the above discussion assumes an inverse relationship between farm size and profitability. It is this assumption that I now query.

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[17]B. Dasgupta, 'Changing Land Relations in Punjab and Implications for Land Reforms', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1977, vol. 24, no. 25, pp. 162-64.
[18]J. Harriss, 'Capitalism and Peasant Production: The Green Revolution in India', in Shanin,T. (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (second edn.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1987, p.234. Crucial to this discussion is an exploration of the process of rural proletarianisation which is taken up in a later section.
[19]A. Rudra, A.Majid and B.D.Talib, 'Big Farmers of Punjab: Some Preliminary Findings of a Sample Survey', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Sept. 1969, vol.4, no.39, pp. A143-A174.

Farm size and Profitability

Discussions of farm size have generated sharp debates and often polarised positions are to be found. Pearse makes the point that 'most of the debates on farm size embrace a conceptual framework discovered for a capitalist economic structure rather than livelihood support systems in pre-capitalist modes of production'.[20]

It is widely argued that as technological innovation demands large amounts of capital, only the rich end of the peasant spectrum could appropriate the new technology effectively. In other words, 'the mechanical innovations were biased to scale, the larger the holding (upto a point) the greater their effectiveness'.[21] T.J.Byres (1982) concludes,

> ...rich peasants (and landlords) could afford to purchase the new inputs - both biochemical and mechanical - because of greater command of resources and because they captured, to a large degree, the institutional credit (supplied by both cooperatives and by commercial banks) that was made available at 'reasonable' rates of interest.[22]

This critical sense in which the 'ideal' impact of the green revolution is described is challenged and breaks down in the face of the evidence given below. This will be illustrated through a study conducted on the change in incomes and their distribution which reveals that most rural people have accrued gains from the expansion of agricultural output.

I shall now discuss Bhalla and Chadha's incisive study covering the years 1961 and 1977, on the impact of the green revolution on income distribution among cultivating households in Punjab, with a special regard to the relative position of marginal (up to 2.5 acres) and small farmers (between 2.5 to 5.0 acres) in the production, income and

[20]Andrew Pears, *Seeds of Plenty, Seeds of Want*, p.106.
[21]T.J.Byres, *The Green Revolution in India: Third World Studies, Case Study 5*, The Open University Press, 1982. p.30.
[22]Ibid., p.40.

consumption nexus. Undoubtedly, the benefits accruing from the new technology are distributed more or less in proportion to the initial land holding position. However, despite the limited land base of the small and marginal farmers of Punjab, they have been able to record almost as much total crop output and farm business income per acre as their bigger counterparts. They have been able to achieve this by recording a much higher cropping intensity through a rational year-round utilisation of their family labour.[23] However, in the central Punjab plains the traditional inverse relationship between farm size and productivity does not hold.

The study brings in to focus another interesting and significant aspect. The modernisation of agriculture in Punjab has created many 'ancillary non-farm activities providing supplementary employment and income to marginal and small farmers'.[24] Farmers engage in a range of non-farm/non-cultivation activities, significantly dairying, hiring out of farm assets and household enterprises. It is from these activities that they are able to obtain higher per capita incomes. They estimate that,

> ...non-farm income constitutes about one-fifth of total household income for cultivating household in general. For marginal farmers it is about 65 per cent of total household income. In terms of per capita terms also, the marginal farmers earn the highest from non-farm activities, compared with all other categories .[25]

[23]G.S.Bhalla and G.K.Chadha, *Green Revolution and the Small Peasant: A Study of Income Distribution among Punjab Cultivators*, New Delhi, 1983, p.160.
[24]G.S.Bhalla and G.K.Chadha, 'The Green Revolution and the Small Peasant - I', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 May 1982, vol. 17, no. 20, p.833.
[25]G.S.Bhalla and G.K.Chadha, 'The Green Revolution and the Small Peasant - II', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 May 1982, vol. 17, no. 21, p.872.

Thus, supplementary earnings are significant in reducing the income inequalities arising out of very disparate land distribution. Thus, it can be seen that agricultural expansion did not necessarily lead to depeasantisation. On the other hand, it would also be preposterous to claim the contrary as observed by Bhalla and Chadha, and other scholars. Bhalla and Chadha observe that it is surprising to note that the marginal and the small farmers are still incurring substantial deficits. Their study reveals that despite the enormous advances in agricultural technology 'about one-third of the marginal farmers (tilling less than 2.5 acres of land) are living below the poverty line'.[26] Further, 'about 24 per cent of small farmers (tilling between 2.5 to 5.0 acres of land) are also living below the poverty line'.[27] A similar conclusion is drawn by Singh's study, that 24 per cent of small farmers and 31 per cent of marginal farmers live below the poverty line in the green revolution state of Punjab.[28] Bardhan concludes that even in the 'throbbing heartland of the Green Revolution', the proportion of people living at subsistence level has increased.[29]

Of course, it would be misleading to interpret this data to imply that each of the marginal and small farmers is running a deficit. Besides, there are bound to be some inter-regional variations for the provinces as a whole, although studies on such variations are not available.

The evidence discussed so far prompts the question, why are the small and marginal peasants accruing deficits despite substantial gains in agricultural as well as non-agricultural

[26]Ibid., p.876.
[27]Ibid., p.876.
[28]G.Singh, `Socio-Economic Basis of the Punjab Crisis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1984, vol. 19, no.1, p.42.
[29]*P.K.Bardhan*, `On the Incidence of Poverty in Rural India of the Sixties', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1973, February, annual no., pp. 245-254.

activities? The germ of the conflict (and I am alluding to the ethno-nationalist movement among the Sikhs), it seems to me, lies in this very contradiction in 'the process of partial depeasantisation'. In this context, it will be helpful to survey studies on the savings and investment undertaken by various households.

I return once again to Bhalla and Chadha's remarkable evidence which demonstrates that marginal and small farmers continue to make a fair amount of investment which compares very favourably with the bigger farmers. Since this is happening despite their deficit on current income account, they conclude that investment expenditure is financed presumably through borrowing. What is also relevant here is that the consumption behaviour of various cultivating households is qualitatively not much different.[30]

On the other hand, their study reveals that the big farmers are recording substantial savings in the rest of Punjab. It is significant though that only a fraction of these savings are used in capital formation in agriculture. Having reached a plateau in farm investment, the rich farmers tend to increase their consumer spending in improving their standard of living through the purchase of automobiles (jeeps, cars, television sets) and also heavy expenditure in social ceremonies. The availability of these surpluses enhances the economic and political power of the upper middle and large farmers in the Punjab countryside[31].

At best, these results give a qualitative picture of the investment by cultivating households and it would be misleading to attempt to derive a general statement. But it is

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[30]G.S.Bhalla and G.K.Chadha, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 May 1982, vol. 17, no, 21, p.872.
[31]The complex agrarian relations which make it a paying proposition for landlords to live on extracting rent rather than go in for productivity raising investment is a theme elaborated by U. Patnaik, `The Agrarian Question and Development of Capitalism in India', *Economic and Political* Weekly, 1986, vol. 21, no. 18, pp. 781-93.

plausible to conclude as Pearse comments that 'although the economies of scale enjoyed by big users of the new technology are not so great yet the big user accrues greater economic advantages from it than the small cultivator does'.[32]

I now turn to the impact of the technological innovation on the local labour in order to illustrate the vigorous displacement it entailed.

2. *Agrarian Change and the Local Labour*

Agricultural labourers who have no rights in land at all constitute a third of the rural population and 20 per cent of the total population of Punjab.[33] Small farmers with land holdings of five acres or less constitute 48.5% of the cultivating households in Punjab.[34]Intensive utilisation of the new technology has greatly increased the demand for

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[32] A.Pearse, *Seeds of Plenty, Seeds of Want*, p.105. 'By cultivator is meant the person(man or woman) who performs the role of organizing and carrying out the sequence of acts that make up agricultural production. He must ensure access to land and water for the period of the crop, he must possess a 'production recipe' or body of technical knowledge about the tasks to be performed, the inputs to be used, the timing of the tasks in relation to growth rates, weather, soil types etc., and the precautions that must be taken against the numerous threats to his crop. He must make dispositions and investments in order to obtain seeds, manures, draught animals, tools, and other objects necessary to the productive process. He is responsible for seeing that the appropriate labour is available, whether it be his own or that of his family and dependents and neighbours, or that which he can contract for wages. And when the crop has been harvested, the cultivator will settle outstanding accounts with those whose goods and services have contributed to the process of production, and retain the balance. Cultivatorship is a kind of 'natural entrepreneurship'. At its most simple, the tasks of cultivatorship may all be performed by a single individual. In the case of most small farms they are performed by the head and members of the household, with some additional labour on an exchange basis or in return for wages in kind or cash. In larger farms, labour becomes separated from the other aspects of cultivatorship and large 'business' farms present a picture of sharp and hierarchical division of function, with labour, management, entrepreneurship, and possibly land-ownership all performed by different persons'(*Pearse,A.* 1980:23-24).

[33]Dalip Singh, *Agricultural Growth and Employment Shifts in Punjab*, New Delhi, Birla Institute, 1982, p.59.

[34]Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, London, Zed Press, 1991, p.179. See also S.S Gill and K.C.Singhal, 'Farmers

agricultural labour. The use of HYV's of wheat and paddy demands high doses of chemical fertilizers, insecticides, weedicides, pesticides and assured irrigation. This has generated a very high seasonal demand for labour in agricultural operations.

'Between 1965-66 and 1972-73 estimated labour requirements in agriculture increased by 78.65 per cent. Further, there has been an increase of 55.31 per cent between 1970-71 to 1980-81. It is estimated that labour requirements on account of wheat-paddy crops increased by 37.18 per cent between 1971-72 and 1981-82. Against this increase in aggregate demand there is an increase in the labour force in agriculture (excluding migratory labour) of 24.8 per cent between 1971 and 1981'.[35]

S.S.Gill identifies four possible reasons for this growth in agricultural labour: These are, one, the complete elimination of pure tenants. Pure tenant holdings constituted 13.01 per cent of total holdings in 1970-71 and were reduced to 1.56 per cent in 1980-81. He maintains that some of them have joined agricultural labourers. Second, the development process has led to a decline in traditional occupations; therefore, workers engaged in occupations like barbers, potters, shoe-makers, weavers and water carriers have been made redundant; their traditional skills rendered useless by mechanization. A study suggests that in parts of Punjab 'this class...stands almost on the verge of extinction'.[36] S.S.Gill notes that a large number of them have become agricultural labourers and they mostly belong to the lower castes. Third, it is important to note that if there has been an increase in the use of

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Agitation Response to Development Crisis of Agriculture', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1984, vol. 19, no.40, p.1728.

[35]S.S.Gill, *Migrant Labour in Rural Punjab*, p.118.

[36]Manmohan H.K.Singh, `Population pressure and labour absorbability in agriculture and related activities: Analysis and suggestions based on field studies conducted in Punjab', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 14, no.11, 1979, p.594.

hired labour, there has also been a decline in the use of family labour. Share component of family labour in wheat declined from 49.54 per cent in 1971-72 to 41.36 per cent in 1981-82 and that of hired labour increased from 50.36 per cent to 58.64 per cent during this period. Fourth, migratory labour from other States, East Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and other areas has joined the ranks of agricultural labourers in Punjab. This is crucial because of the implications it has for the local agricultural labour.[37]

'Empirical evidence shows that wages of agricultural labourers are lower in those districts (Patiala and Ludhiana) with high concentration of migrants than those districts (Amritsar and Faridkot) with low concentration of migrants'.[38] This perhaps has allowed the farmers to break the monopoly of local labourers and their demand for higher wages. It is also important to note that whereas the migrant labourer is paid individual wages the local labourers demand family wages.

Another recent study covering the years 1961 to 1977 reveals that 'in many years the rise in money wages lagged behind price changes, leading to reduced real wage rates for most operations between 1965 and 1968, and again in 1974, 1975 and 1977'.[39] Perhaps this suggests one of the reasons why even in the 'prime' green revolution area of Punjab and Haryana, the proportion of people below a bare minimum level of living has increased.

[37]This important issue is discussed by R.Jeffrey. He notes that the immigrant labourers are overwhelmingly Hindu, therefore, `they are used as a 'threat'to unite Sikhs of all classes' (*Jeffrey,R.* 1986:33). He further explains that `for the large majority of poorer Sikhs, for example, there is more self-esteem to be won from acceptance as a full and admired member of a hallowed faith than in taking part in class-based organizations with purely economic goals'(*Jeffrey,R.* 1986:33).

[38]S.S. Gill, Migrant Labour in Rural Punjab, p.123.

[39]S.Bhalla, 'Real Wage Rates of Agricultural Labourers in Punjab 1961-77', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1979, vol. 14. no. 26, pp. A57-A68.

From this it is fairly evident that the relationship between agricultural growth, employment and poverty is not as straight forward as it is often claimed in conventional theories of labour market. It is also clear that in fact the rural labour market in Punjab has been characterised by the deliberate exclusion of local labour and is inclined towards establishing control over local labourers. It is perhaps worth pausing and asking ourselves,

3. How far has the Green Revolution as part of the foregoing process contributed to rural proletarianization? [40]

On the basis of the evidence available it would be misleading to claim that the green revolution resulted in the complete dispossession of the poor peasantry in Punjab. Unfortunately, no systematic data is available on the consequences of recurrent losses incurred by the small and marginal farmers. However, one should not underestimate the fierce tenacity with which peasants will attempt to hold on to their land. Moreover, there is no evidence to support any distress sale of land by the small or marginal farmers in Punjab.

Two other studies examine the effect agricultural expansion had on the tenants although they come to different conclusions. It is worth noting that both the studies consider different regions of Punjab. A study carried out in the Ferozepur district of Punjab (Kahlon and Singh, 1973,II) between 1967-68 and 1971-7 showed that, the average value of land in the sample studied rose by 75 per cent. In spite of increased investment in machinery, land still accounted for 84 per cent of the total value of assets. The figures from Ferozepur demonstrate that the increased demand and higher price of land favoured its concentration in the hands of the large landowners. Small proprietors who constituted the

[40] 'This is, the creation of a class which survives and reproduces itself simply by selling its labour' (*Byres,T* 1982:41).

majority of cultivators, could no longer invest in the purchase and improvement of land while the larger farms invested profusely in land once the possibilities of new technology became apparent.

Francine Frankel (1970) has described the position of tenants in the district of Ludhiana, Punjab in some detail. He maintains that as the potential profits from direct cultivation look increasingly attractive, the demand for land rises. Where large proprietors still give out land on lease, rents charged are 50-70 per cent higher than before the introduction of the new varieties, but share-tenancies are common.

> In many instances, landowners may ask for 70 per cent of the crop as their share, arguing that with the new methods the tenant still receives a larger absolute portion from 30 per cent of a higher output than 50 per cent of a lower out-turn. But since the small owner-cum-tenant cultivators cannot afford to invest in optimum cultivation practices, they find the new rentals uneconomic and generally are forced to give up...

Another alternative mentioned by Frankel can best be described as 'share-labourer', in which a large owner provides land and inputs to a cultivator with or without resources, to whom he allows 20 per cent of the harvest in return for his cultivatorship and labour' (Pearse,A. 1980:125). This process has been characterised as 'partial proletarianization' by Byres who concludes that,

> The `new technology' has produced conditions in which, by a variety of means, the poor peasantry are, increasingly, being pushed out of *self-employment* into *wage labour*. The poor peasant must, to a growing extent, sell his labour power in order to survive.[41]

Byres (1982) considers the new share cropping as a form of partial proletarianization. According to him, 'the landlord supplies the new, bought inputs and, in

[41]T.Byres, *The Green Revolution in India*, The Open University Press, 1982, p.41.

return, takes a far higher share'.[42] However, 'the share cropper retains possession of some of the means of production and continues to have semblance of a stake in the land (and bears more risk than a wage labourer)'.[43]

Occupational Shifts

In 1971, agricultural and allied activities employed 63.62 per cent of total workers in Punjab. They included cultivators, agricultural labourers and workers. Their combined share declined to 61.55 per cent in 1981. However, among these categories cultivators suffered a decline in share from 42.56 per cent to 37.39 per cent between 1971 and 1981. This indicates that 5.17 per cent of the potential cultivators shifted to other occupations. In absolute terms the shift of potential cultivators to other occupations amounts to 273,451. Available evidence does not suggest that cultivators have joined agricultural labourers on a significant scale.[44]

It is interesting to note that the small farmers prefer wage employment outside agriculture rather than wage employment inside agriculture even though such opportunities are available in the countryside. The reason behind this rather peculiar behaviour is attributed to the 'socio-cultural milieu in rural Punjab' without much elaboration.[45]

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[42]Ibid., p.41.
[43]Ibid.,p.41.
[44]S.S. Gill, Migrant Labour in Rural Punjab, p.31.
[45]G.S. Bhalla and G.K. Chadha, 'The Green Revolution and the Small Peasant - I', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 May 1982, vol. 17, no. 20, p. 833.

Some of the micro level studies reveal that a section of these cultivators have migrated to other places where they could purchase more land at a cheaper price or they have joined non-agricultural occupations particularly in the tertiary sector.[46]

Two significant observations regarding occupational shifts may be made. One, traditional occupations of self-employment such as cultivation and household industry are experiencing a decline.[47] Their combined share of total workers declined from 45.63 per cent in 1971 to 39.99 per cent in 1981.[48] On the other hand, occupations which depend on hired labour have gained in their share of total workers in the state as described in the previous section. The phenomenon of employing wage labour is true for agricultural as well as for non-agricultural occupations. Since most of the non-agricultural employment is concentrated in towns and cities, an increase in percentage share of non-agricultural employment has implications for rural to urban migration in the state.

Migration

According to Gill's estimate, 'until 1971 Punjab was a net migrant state but the decade of 1971-82 reversed this process. During the decade of 1971-81 there was net gain in share of urban population by 4 per cent compared to 1961-71, migration of population in urban areas during 1971-81 was seven times'.[49] He further notes that in the busy season, migrant labour consists of 50 per cent of the local agricultural labourers in the state.

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[46]Paramjit Singh, *Changes in Pattern of Land Holdings in Punjab - A Case Study of Sangrur District*, Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1989.
[47]The growth rate of house-hold industries is a sluggish 14.64 per cent. See S.S. Gill, Migrant Labour in Rural Punjab, p.33.
[48]Ibid., p.36.
[49]Ibid., p.116-117.

Macro-determinants of out-migration from the state

One of the points to establish is that despite the high level of development in the rural areas of Punjab, the state has witnessed a significantly high out-migration of its rural young male population to different parts of the country and to other nations. It is surprising indeed that migration from rural areas occurs despite the existence of income earning opportunities in agriculture and high levels of urban unemployment.

The study conducted by Oberai and Singh (1980) reveals that 'occupationwise, the three significant categories of employed out-migrants are cultivators (60.4 per cent), agricultural labourers (11.4 per cent), and production process workers (10.3 per cent).The breakdown of production process workers reveals that they belong mostly to the artisan class that cannot find remunerative work for lack of demand for their traditional skills because of disintegration of the household industry and introduction of new farm machinery. A remarkable category of out-migrants is the sales workers, all of whom migrated to the urban areas. They are *banians* who normally engage in money-lending as well as trade. Their shift to towns provides an essential link with the rapid growth of agriculture, at the same time as it widens the scope of their activities'.[50]

Another study identifies some of the factors which conduce towards rural to urban migration. 'Male literacy level, proportion of male workers in non-agricultural sector and the level of development of infrastructure facilities, particularly emerge as the more stronger push factors in out-migration of people from the rural areas'.[51]

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[50]A.S.Oberoi and Manmohan H.K. Singh, 'Migration Flows in Punjab's Green Revolution Belt', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1980, vol. 15, no. 13, p.A-5.
[51]R.S.Goyal, 'Migration and Rural Development in Punjab: A Study of Inter- Relationships', *Man & Development*, 1990, p.75.

Therefore, it would be misleading to conclude that rural development helps in containing out-migration of people as it opens up more employment avenues and opportunities in the rural areas. This may well be true in the initial stages of rural development, but after reaching a high level of development (in the context of the overall socio-economic development of the region), aspirations of people also grow and the effectiveness of development as a migration-controlling factor becomes limited.

Before proceeding further, it will be useful to recapitulate the main propositions put forward thus far. Our examination of the impact of the introduction of new technology on the prevailing agrarian social structure of Punjab shows that new agricultural technology was unfavourable to the lower strata of the population in three significant ways. First, the introduction of the capital intensive modern agricultural technology resulted in a shift in the distribution of operated land in favour of the rich farmers. Second, the green revolution increased the demand for agricultural labour in Punjab, thereby encouraging the migration of cheap labour from other states. This had an adverse affect on the local labour. Third, the introduction of the green revolution resulted in drastic occupational shifts and out-migration, primarily of the lower strata of the population. Now I shall describe how this induced a grave crisis among the small and marginal farmers of Punjab propelling them into an armed ethno-nationalist struggle against the Indian state. I shall do so by considering the socio-economic background of the activists.

C) Profiles of the Sikh Activists - Babies of the Green Revolution?

This section describes the evidence from three micro-level studies on the socio-economic background of the activists in the ethno-nationalist movement in Punjab.

Singh's micro-level study[52] contradicts the commonly held notion that the activists belong to the deprived economic status, on the contrary it reveals that the family occupation of the majority of the youth is agriculture and they belong to relatively better off landowning families. Singh examines three features to establish the socio-economic background of the activists. First, most of the youths were between twenty-one to thirty years of age. Second, caste affiliation reveals that Jats are the single dominant caste among activists. Third, the education level reveals that 50 per cent were below matriculation standard, of which 25 per cent were illiterates.

Similar conclusions are drawn by the study of S.S.Gill (1991) which attempts to establish the socio-economic background of forty activists, twenty each from the Kapurthala and Ropar districts of Punjab. His data was collected in January 1991 and has been reproduced below with his permission. [53]

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[52]J.S. Singh, *The Role of Sikh Youth Activists in the Current Punjab Crisis*, Unpublished M.Phil thesis, Department of Sociology, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1987-88.

[53]I owe deep gratitude to Professor S.S.Gill for providing me with this data, which was collected by him in January 1991.

Table 9

Age Composition of the Activists

Age (in years)	Number	Percentage
25 and below	29	72.5
26-30	9	22.5
30 and above	2	5.0
Total	40	100.0

Table 10

Education Level of the Activists

Education	Number	Percentage
illiterate	3	7.5
matric and below	25	62.5
graduates and above	12	30.0
Total	40	100.0

Table 11

Family Land Holdings (Ownership) of the Activists

Size of Landholdings (Acres)	Number	Percentage
landless	8	20
upto 5	11	27.5
5-10	14	35.0
above 104	7	17.5
Total	40	100.0

Table 12

Caste Background of the Activists

Caste	Number	Percentage
jat sikh	30	75
kamboj	3	7.5
saini	2	5.0
arkhan(carpenter)	1	2.5
nai (barber)	1	2.5
rai sikh	1	2.5
harijan	2	5.0
Total	40	100.0

*Source: The data in the four tables given above was collected by S.S.Gill in January,1991 and has been reproduced with his permission.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the data given above: First, a majority of the activists (72.5 per cent) were below twenty-five years of age. Second, most of the youth (75 per cent) belonged to the dominant Jat caste.[54] Third, the educational background of 62.5 per cent of the activists is below matriculation. Lastly, only 20 per cent belonged to the most deprived of the rural population i.e.. the landless, and the majority of them were drawn from small and marginal cultivators.

I now turn to my own data which was collected in January 1992.[55]S.S.Bal, veteran journalist, has conducted extensive interviews with the activists and their families over the last decade in Punjab. From his interviews, I appropriated the data on the socio-economic background of the activists. I follow Gill's mode of analysis in drawing the tables given below, this enables the comparison between the two data easier.

[54]Details of the various castes mentioned in table 11 are provided in the Introduction, see pp. 3-4.

[55]I am indebted to Mr.S.S.Bal, Sub-Editor of *The Punjabi Tribune*, for providing me with relevant material on this matter.

Table 13

Age Composition of the Activists

Age (Years)	Number	Percentage
25 and below	18	51.43
26-30	7	20.00
30 and above	10	28.57
Total	35	100

Table 14

Education Level of the Activists

Education	Number	Percentage
Illiterate	3	8.57
Matric and below	24	68.57
Bachelers and above	8	22.86
Total	35	100

Table 15

Family Land Holdings (Ownership) of the Activists

Size of Land Holdings (Acres)	Number	Percentage
Landless	none	0
Upto 5	14	40.00
5-10	10	28.57
10 and above	15	42.86
Total	35	100

Table 16

Caste Background of the Activists

Caste	Number	Percentage
Jat Sikh	31	88.57
Kamboj	1	2.86
Saini	2	5.71
Tarkhan (carpenter)	1	5.71
Total	35	100

A comparison of the three studies leads us to conclude that the activists belong to the group of second generation, semi-educated, high caste, low class, small and marginal farmers.

II

Peasant Insurrection and the Rise of Armed Resistance

Our attention thus far has been focused on the effect of transition to commercial agriculture on the prevailing social structure of the province. It has been demonstrated that: first, the green revolution strategy led to *partial depeasantisation* of the small and marginal farmers. Second, that most of the activists engaged in the Sikh ethno-regional movement belonged to this partially depeasantised strata of the population. I now attempt to relate the above two strands by posing the following questions: What are the potential sources of peasant insurrection? More specifically, I indicate the situations which favour a peasant rebellion as a response to the challenge of commercial agriculture. What are the historical circumstances under which a peasant revolt assumes the form of an armed ethno-nationalist struggle? What accounts for this form of political behaviour?

At the outset, I must acknowledge that I do not attempt to explain the religious content or appeal of the ethno-nationalist movement. This has already been discussed in

chapter three. Our main concern in this chapter is to explain the timing and establish the social composition of the ethno-regional movement among the Sikhs. In this section we will examine how changes in the social base explain the timing of an ethnoregional movement.

The Pattern of Modernisation

One way to understand the conditions which give rise to the spectre of agrarian uprising is to trace out the characteristic pattern of modernisation. Traditional economic explanations postulate a revolutionary outbreak when there is widespread decline in the peasant's material situation under the impact of agricultural modernisation. In the case of Punjab, we noted early in the account that there was a conspicuous improvement in the economic and social situation of a large sector of the rural population under the green revolution strategy. Even though the new technology facilitated 'take-off' for cultivators with land and some capital, there is evidence that a substantial section of the population derived some form of benefit from the introduction of the new technology. Thus, as a general explanation the material approach is too simplistic to suffice. The question then arises, why did the Sikh peasants rise in a bloody revolt despite a significant improvement in their material conditions? Another common explanation emphasises the psychological aspects of improvement in the economic situation of the peasantry to explain potential revolutionary upsurges. Although the hypothesis of rising aspirations has significant explanatory weight, it does not explain why peasants in other Indian states, such as Punjab's neighbouring state of Haryana did not rise in a peasant rebellion, although the green revolution wrought similar changes in their material situation. Thus material

conditions in and by themselves are not the decisive factor in determining the outbreak of a rural upheaval.

Agricultural Innovation and External Dependence

Let us now have a closer look at some of the structural features which may have made the Sikh peasants more receptive to an ethno-nationalist armed struggle. We will begin by examining the wider implications of commercial transformation in agriculture and then relate these issues to the specific case of Punjab. The trends toward commercial agriculture require heavily capital intensive new technology and higher expenditures on industrially produced inputs and the sale of an increased proportion of its harvest. The transformation from self-provisioning to market-oriented agriculture is frequently discriminatory since it calls on the cultivator to amend too many distinct aspects of his technology all at once, and to attempt a radical leap forward in which there is discontinuity between the existing and the new. This obligatory and brusque change into capital-intensive commercial farming is aggravated by the concentration of capital and technical services in already favoured areas. The result is that the large cultivators secure from a qualitatively more profitable agriculture and greater competitive strength in the market increased political power. The customary privileges enjoyed by the big farmers allow them to enhance their business position and accrue maximum possible share of government-granted facilities.

When the new technology replaces or is added to the older agricultural systems on a large scale, it requires the purchase of products from the industrial sector: chemical fertilisers and machinery. The seeds, usually propagated by scientific research centres have to be obtained from urban distributors. Further, the local cultivator has to depend upon

technical services and institutional credit supplied through rural development programmes. Table 17 shows that short term agricultural credit rose from Rs 568.9 million in 1975 to Rs 5529.3 million in 1992.

Table 17

Short Term Agricultural Loans (Rupees in million)

Year	Cash	Kind	Total
1975-76	63.8	505.1	568.9
1980-81	752.8	1452.1	2204.9
1985-86	1143.3	2015.9	3249.2
1986-87	1179.3	1885.4	3064.7
1987-88	1399.8	1731.8	3131.6
1988-89	1859.9	1755.3	3615.2
1989-90	2491.1	2545.3	5036.4
1990-91	1820.8	1810.4	3631.2
1991-92	2829.4	2699.9	5529.3

* Source: Agriculture in Punjab 1991-92, Department of Agriculture, Chandigarh, Punjab.

What then are the implications of increased external dependence for the rural strata? The dependence of the locality upon the urban-technical network is that 'it biases the distribution of advantage in favour of those who have the experience and social attributes necessary for confronting the city and the bureaucracy, the printed instructions, and the political caucuses; and puts relative handicap on those whose assets include traditional knowledge of the local idiosyncrasies of soil and climate', and whose energies are absorbed by the labours of husbandry rather than in manipulating the rural-urban nexus'.[56]Thus, peasants may find themselves competitors for credit or irrigation facilities with agriculturists who have city houses and political connections.

[56]A. Pearse, *Seeds of Plenty, Seeds of Want*, p.159.

Further, external dependence implies the atomised and fragmented local cultivator, the individual productive unit becoming a part of a larger system of production and exchange. This tends to withdraw much of the decision-making autonomy from the former, and subjects it to national and international networks. So far, the transformation to a market-oriented agriculture increases external dependence. Thus the overall result is that the green revolution made cultivators heavily dependent on conditions over which they had no control. If the general conditions of the small peasants discussed so far indicate that the intrusion of the market into the agrarian economy led to the establishment of a strong central authority, the creation of a powerful centralised authority intensified the burden on the peasantry through administrative bureaucracy and expensive policy. Significantly, although the rapid economic leap entails brusque changes at all levels of the society, the intrusion of external market relationships was far from positing a threat to the entire peasant mode of life, religion or the prevailing social order.

Thus, the rising trend towards agriculture economic modernisation put new strains on the existing relationship binding the peasant community to the upper strata of society. These observations prompt the question: what prevented an outbreak of a revolutionary rebellion against the landed upper classes or a communist-led peasant revolution? To discuss this question adequately would require examination of the explosive theme on what makes Indian society immune to revolutionary tendencies. Space precludes an adequate treatment of this vast and fascinating theme. Nonetheless, a skeletal treatment of some of the issues is offered below. This is followed by a discussion exploring the network of social relationships in Punjab which I believe have a significant bearing on political tendencies.

At the beginning of this research I was inclined towards explanations which explained the alleged absence for revolutionary change in Indian society in cultural terms. First of all it is argued that the institution of caste enforces hierarchical submission and provides immunity from any thorough and violent overhaul of Indian society. Not only do such explanations deny the role of the human agency by viewing society is as a unhistorical, immutable entity, but the striking evidence in Indian history of numerous insurrections challenging Brahmanical hegemony, Sikhism being one of the most vital of such movements, flies in the face of such arguments. However, the second dimension of cultural explanations is more convincing. Barrington Moore's (1966) classic account of change from an agrarian to industrial society in the major countries of the world examines the historical conditions which give rise to alliances or conflicts between the landed classes and the peasantry and the political consequences of these social formations. Moore's well documented account attributes the lack of a revolution in India to the diversity and amorphousness of Indian society which impedes any effective political action. In other words, fragmentation along caste and regional lines provides an effective barrier to widespread insurrection. Moore argues that 'petty' hostilities based on religion, caste or language neutralise each other, thus local discontents cannot fuse into a revolutionary upsurge. As Moore notes, 'Revolutions come with panhuman ideals, not trivial regional ones'.[57]Let us now test Moore's proposition in the concrete case of the rural upheaval among Sikhs in Punjab.

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[57]Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Penguin Books, first published in 1966, reprinted 1981, p.385.

Undoubtedly, the intrusion of commercial agriculture had aroused the reactionary ends of a substantial section of the Sikh peasantry by the late 1970s and political upheaval seemed most likely. But any potential antagonism between the landed upper classes and the peasant community was dampened to some extent by the shared experience of problems over the supply of power to pumpsets, supply of credit, and product prices. Moreover, the Sikh peasantry shared a religion, notably Sikhism and belonged to the same caste group, notably Jats, with the landed upper classes. These network of social relationships promoted cohesion between the Sikh peasantry and the landed strata of the population. Our study of the Sikh case highlights the complex, often contradictory role of the caste system in promoting social cohesion but this view does not contradict our reluctance to accept arguments which stress the ideological role of the caste institution in preventing any form of change in Indian society. Returning to the Sikh case for the moment, the caste system induces the choice of occupations, so that the Sikhs are generally associated with landed occupations and the urban Punjabi Hindus linked to petty mercantile professions. This has significant political implications. Since these castes also occupy leading positions in their respective religious categories they are able to invoke the solidarity of their religious group.[58]Further there is the familiar line of cleavage between the urban and the rural sectors of the population based on rural requirement for high food prices and the urban desire for cheap food products. No wonder that the first stirrings of the Sikh unrest began by a series of peaceful mass demonstrations led by the Akali Dal to present a set of 'legitimate' grievances to the central government. However, it is critical to note that at this stage it was

[58]The Sikhs belonging to the jat caste and the Hindus belonging to the khatri caste occupy the dominant positions among the Sikh and the Hindu caste groups respectively in Punjab.

a moderate movement concerned specifically with farmers demands and for greater state autonomy. In the initial phase the uprising was led by the traditional Akali leaders with close ties to the peasants. The bloody repression of the movement by the central government resulted in its progressive radicalisation. We have discussed this aspect in considerable detail in chapter four.

The religious component in political behaviour in India has been discussed with regard to the nature of Indian cosmological self-understandings and the central place of religion in Indian society in chapter two. Nonetheless, it may be appropriate to re-emphasise the religious currents impinging on the Sikh peasantry which have been significant in determining the political behaviour of the Sikh peasantry. Here the trade union experience of a leader of a powerful guerrilla organisation is illuminating. Commenting on the plight of mill workers he complains, 'There was no treatment if one got injured; there were no schools for our children. The worker is producing and the officer is sitting in his chair! The worker's son is not at school; the officer's child is at boarding school! He has accommodation; we, the workers, have none! So I sought to work within the Akali Dal to bring about some changes to this situation in the light of Sikh principles.'[59]On his disappointment with the trade union, he observes, 'They said there was no God. I had joined them for three years in the '70s but their talk of revolution was without any basis. They talked only of Lenin. Their inspiration came from him, but they never talked anything about Sikhism. We want our independence on the basis of what Guru Gobind Singh told

[59]Wassan Singh Zaffarwal, leader of the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), quoted in Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*, London, 1995, p.145.

us, not Lenin.'[60] Likewise, the guerrilla activists reiterated the centrality of social and economic justice in Sikh religious tradition and pointed out that the current phase of Sikh resistance was a transposition of the historic Sikh challenge to the divinely ordained Brahmanical hierarchical structure of power and wealth. The repressive social forces were now believed to be represented by the central government.[61]

To sum up, the powerful institutional and social links between the different strata of the Sikh population served as a strong bar to a peasant rebellion against the established Sikh landed classes. Religion, caste and the common experience of transition in agriculture bound the peasants to the landed élites. Moreover, a common web of customary relationships engaged them in face to face interaction. These factors are significant in explaining the remarkable curtailment of a revolutionary outbreak among the Sikh peasantry despite the political forces unleashed by the transition to agricultural economic modernisation. However, these explanations do not account for the efflorescence of the ethno-regional movement nor explain why the central government became the target of attack and discontent.

Vandana Shiva's (1991) account of the ecological and social implications of the green revolution in Punjab relates the conflict to the sharing of economic and political power between the centre and the state. She maintains the new technology involves intensive external inputs which leads to the restructuring of relationships between the

[60]Wassan Singh Zaffarwal, leader of the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), quoted in Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab,* pp.144,145.
[61]This inference is based on my fieldwork experience in Punjab, conducted between October 1992 and April 1993, during which I interviewed several key persons involved in the guerrilla movement. See also the social profiles of guerrillas presented by Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, especially pp.154,155,159,161,170,174.

atomised and fragmented cultivator and the state. She further argues that since the externally supplied inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, water and electricity were scarce, it led to competition over scarce resources between classes and between regions. With the government as referee, handing down decisions in all matters, each frustration becomes a political issue. In a context of diverse communities, that centralised control leads to communal and regional conflict. Every policy decision is translated into the politics of 'we' and 'they'. 'We' have been unjustly treated, while 'they' have gained privileges unfairly. In Punjab, this polarised thinking gets expressed with the added dimension of religious discrimination against the Sikhs. Thus, Vandana Shiva's account highlights the unique position of the Sikhs vis-à-vis the central government in order to explain the efflorescence of the Sikh nationalist movement in the 1980s. Although Vandana Shiva's account is polemical and overstated, it does raise the question of the forms of antagonisms among classes, regions and the central government as a consequence of the green revolution strategy. If we see the issues in these terms, can we explain the emergence of those ethno-nationalist struggles in India, such as the Jharkhand movement among the hill tribes of Central India, which are not couched in religious terms? Moreover, Vandana Shiva's account provides a partial understanding of the rise of the mass agitation launched by the Akali Dal. It does not explain why the movement assumed the form of an armed ethno-nationalist struggle.

So far our focus has solely been on the Sikh community. However, the mounting evidence accumulated in chapter four suggests that one cannot understand the rise of ethno-regional struggle without reference to the actions of the central government that in

large measure provoked it. Here a brief conspectus of Donald L.Horowitz's (1985) explanation regarding secessionist movements of an advanced group in a backward region is instructive. According to Horowitz, the conditions under which an ethno-nationalist movement emerges is determined by 'domestic politics, by the relations of groups and regions within the state'. He further classifies the Sikhs as an advanced group in a backward region and argues that advanced groups are late seceders and they just seek assurances of non-discrimination. He observes that advanced groups 'attempt secession only when all hope of salvaging their position in the country is dashed'.[62] Since India attained independence in 1947, the Sikhs have not only felt increasingly discriminated and their opportunities curtailed. But the central government ruthlessly used the powerful repressive apparatus of the state to quell seemingly legitimate demands of the Akali Dal. Undoubtedly, the specific policies of the central government had a considerable bearing on Sikh communal perceptions. Nonetheless, these are some preliminary formulations which require fuller development. This will be accomplished later in conjunction with other aspects, for instance, the spread of literacy and the affect of mass media in conjuring a particular form of identity consciousness.

In this chapter we have explained the timing of the Sikh ethno-nationalist struggle in the late 1970s with reference to the introduction of new agricultural technology in the late 1960s. We have shown that fifteen years of the operation of green revolution induced a radicalization of the Sikh peasantry and enabled the formation of a social base for the Sikh ethno-nationalist movement. Further, the timing of Sikh ethno-nationalism is explained in

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[62]Horowitz, D.L. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley, University of California Press, Los Angeles & London, 1985, p.244.

conjunction with the revolution in communication which had also achieved its results by the late 1970s.

6
Transformation in Social Communication and Religious Controversy: Dialogues in Vernacular Languages

It is often argued that widely available and influential media such as the press and the electronic media produce inclusive and exclusive forms of nationalist identities that recharge nationalism with varying degrees of symbolic significance. In this last chapter we consider the contribution of popular mass media such as the vernacular press, cassettes and television, in the generation and maintenance of modes of nationalist discourse. The vast expansion in readership of newspapers, listeners of radio cassettes and television viewership justifies our selection of this aspect as central to the process of identity formation in Punjab. This bears out our contention that transformation in social communication is vital in the facilitation of nationalism. Although there is a long established tradition of press in Punjab and a significant literate population, there is a paucity of literature on this subject. The available research on media studies in India focuses mainly on the television and on the English language press; role of the vernacular press in the socio-political sphere has been virtually overlooked.

Messages of popular mass appeal can be transmitted equally through the radio, the television and the press. All India Radio (AIR), the national service, was first set up in 1936 and since 1947 it has been under the tight control of the Central government. The state governments or the independent companies have no right to run their stations. This allows only AIR to produce religious broadcasts, which are carefully monitored to prevent charges that particular religious groups are favoured. In recent years, Akali Dal leaders have demanded that Sikh religious sermons be given wider coverage. Virtually the same holds true for the television medium, or *doordarshan*, as

it is popularly referred in India. The broadcast of a seventy-eight episode serialized broadcast of the *Ramayana*, the great Hindu epic poem, on national television between January 1987 and July 1988 had remarkable repercussions. According to one estimate the televised tale attracted a huge audience of some 80 to 100 million.[1] The success of this new innovation of dramatization of Hindu religious tales facilitated the campaign of the Hindu radical right on the Ayodhya controversy. Not only did the telecast enhance popular knowledge about Ayodhya as the birthplace of Lord Rama, but it cemented the vast, unrelated nation of Hindu viewers. Moreover, the projection of mainstream Hindu culture, with emphasis on the Hindu character of the Indian nation, through the television medium exacerbated apprehension among religious minorities. Therefore, in India, radio and television are not effective media to communicate minority nationalist discourse. Instead, it is necessary to concentrate our attention on the vernacular press.

The first section of this chapter examines the growth of literacy in Punjab and its impact on the religious and social spheres. The second section traces the history of the press in Punjab. The following section examines the circulation figures and the readership profile of the three major newspapers in Punjab. Section four considers the role of cassette culture in socio-political movements in India, with the focus on the contribution of cassettes in the meteoric rise of a charismatic religious figure in Punjab in the late 1970s.

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[1]Philip Lutgendorf, 'Ramayan: the Video', *The Drama Review* 4, no., 1990, p.136.

I
Mass Literacy

In 1961, 27 per cent of the total population of Punjab - and 24 per cent of India's - could read and write. By 1974, 78 per cent of primary-age children in Punjab were attending school, the second highest in India, exceeded only by southern Kerala (96 per cent) - India's most literate state. The number of primary school teachers rose from 23000 in 1966-7, as the period of green revolution began, to 34000 in 1970-1. By 1974, virtually the entire rural population had a primary school within two kilometres. The number of college students increased from 35000 in 1964-65 to 100000 in 1968-9 and 110 000 in the mid-1970s. By 1981, literacy in Punjab had risen to 41 per cent and by 1992, 49 per cent of the population was literate. In the 1980s three out of five men in Punjab could read and write.[2]

Table 18

Percentage of literacy in total population

Rural	62,53,432	44.06
Urban	36,99,533	61.64
TOTAL	99,52,965	49.29

* Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab, 1992.

The rise of mass literacy in Punjab is not to be viewed in the context of urbanisation and industrialisation or the requirements of a modern state. The processes of modernity of most significance was the modernisation of agriculture as a consequence of the green revolution in Punjab and more broadly, the consequences of nation building in a huge, culturally diverse country such as India. In the case of

[2]Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India: Punjab, ethnic conflict, Mrs. Gandhi's death and the test for federalism*, London, 1986, pp. 81-83.

Western Europe education became a requirement and necessity of the modern state. As Gellner points out, it became necessary to have a culturally homogeneous population which was provided by the state through a uniform education system. Besides, education was necessary in order to become full citizens. By contrast, education is received and valued in a widely different cultural context in India. Leaf (1972) observes the importance and the steady increase of schools in local religious and political affairs. For farming families, education provides an opportunity for agricultural research and learning skills concerning technical agricultural knowledge. Non-agricultural income supplements the income from the land. From the cultural viewpoint, education raises the value of a potential bride or bridegroom.[3]

The increase in literacy went hand in hand with the expansion of transport and the road network to every village in Punjab. In the mid-1960's when the green revolution was introduced, close to half of Punjab's villages were not connected through sealed roads. Roads became a necessity in order to fulfil the new possibilities of agriculture. In the span of the Third Five Year Plan (1961-6), the state had built only 2280 kilometres of road, but in the single year of 1969-70, it added 1,920 kilometres. Punjab had 10,000 kilometres of sealed roads by 1970, 25,000 kilometres by 1975 and 95 per cent of its villages were linked by sealed roads by the end of the decade.[4]The expansion of road networks produced a demand for all kinds of motor vehicles. Robin Jeffrey (1986) suggests that road networks broaden horizons and

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[3]M.J.Leaf, *Song of Hope: The Green Revolution in a Punjab Village*, New Jersey, 1984, pp.254,255.
[4]Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India*, p.79.

enhance expectations of people. Rising literacy, in conjunction with expanding road networks, allows easier dissemination of print capitalism.

II
The Press in Punjab

History of the Press in Punjab

> We do not fully comprehend the scope of the expression `our vernacular languages'. The vernacular of Punjab - which is that? Is it the Persian, the Urdu, the Hindi or the Punjabi? Or is it all put together? Not even the learned orientalists ever took it into their hands to solve this great preliminary question...They proceeded to build the superstructure without laying the foundations
>
> Editorial in *The Tribune*, 9 April, 1881.

A discussion of the role of newspaper media in Punjab cannot preclude the dilemma posed by the above question. In the absence of an unbroken history of a particular language as a medium of high cultural and political communication, the role of newspaper media in defining religious and linguistic identities poses peculiar problems.

The history of early Indian language journalism in Punjab can be traced back to the 1860's. Two newspapers in the Gurmukhi script were established before 1880. Until 1880, the Indian language press was an offshoot of Hindi journalism. The two newspapers published in Gurmukhi, *The Sukavya Samodhini* and *The Kavi Chandrodaya,* were closer to Sanskritised Hindi than to Punjabi. It was only after the emergence of the Singh Sabha movement in 1873 that an urgent need was felt for a medium to advocate the cause of the movement. This suggests that the vernacular

press arose partly in response to the 1880s reform movements among the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs in Punjab, which in turn were a consequence of colonialism.[5]

Barns (1940) examined the foundation of the press in India and showed how the Indian press developed along closely similar lines to British journalism. 'There was to be the same spirit of enquiry regarding the administration of government and hitherto accepted social customs, as well as a parallel demand on the part of an ever increasing body of opinion for a share in the control of public affairs'.[6] The press in the English language was influenced by western discourses of liberalism and was initially a vehicle for the colonial authorities.

Growth of the Vernacular Press

Circulation Figures

The press in Punjab is multi-lingual. Of the three major newspapers in Punjab, the English daily, *The Tribune,* is the oldest. The two vernacular newspaper groups, the Ajit and the Hind Samachar group started their first publication in Urdu, which was the official language of Punjab before the partition of India in 1947.

There has been a rise in number and circulation figures of newspapers published in other Indian languages since 1947. The Hind Samachar group began its Hindi publication in 1965 and its Punjabi publication in 1978. The Ajit group began its sister Punjabi publication in 1955. The Tribune group launched its sister publications in Hindi and Punjabi in 1978. The *Hind Samachar* has the largest circulation in North India and

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[5]This theme is well illustrated in Emmett David, *Press and Politics in British Western Punjab (1836-1947)*, 1983, Academic Publications, Delhi.

[6]M.Barnes, *The Indian Press*, London, 1940,p.25.

in Punjab as a Hindi daily, the *Ajit* has the largest circulation as a Punjabi daily and the English daily, the *Tribune* is the most widely read newspaper in English in Punjab, as the following tables reveal.

Table 19

Circulation figures of the four major newspapers in Punjab in 1991

Name of the Newspaper	Language published in	Circulation figures
Hind Samachar Group		
a) Punjab Kesari	Hindi	155,239
b) Hind Samachar	Urdu	24,207 224,547copies/day
c) Jag Bani	Punjabi	45,101
Ajit	Punjabi	161,811 copies/day
The Tribune Group		
a) The Tribune	English	74,541
b) Dainik Tribune	Hindi	8,407 138,629copies/day
c) Punjabi Tribune	Punjabi	55,681
Express Group*		
a) Indian Express	English	18,830
b) Janasatta	Hindi	7,238 26,068 copies/day

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulation (A.B.C), July-December, 1991.

*Figures for July-December 1991 are not available, hence taken from a previous period.

Table 20

History of the Punjab Press

	HIND SAMACHAR GROUP	AJIT GROUP	TRIBUNE GROUP
Year of Establishment	1948	1944	1881
Language of initial Publication	Urdu	Urdu	English
Other Newspaper Publications along with Language of Publication	*Punjab Kesari* (Hindi) *Jag Bani* (Punjabi)	Daily *Ajit* (Punjabi)	Dainik *Tribune* (Hindi) Punjabi T*ribune* (Punjabi)
Year of First Publication	1965,1978	1955	1978
Founder Editor	Lala Jagat Narain	Sadhu Singh	Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia
Religion and Caste of founder editor	Hindu Khatri	Sikh Khatri	Sikh Jat Aristocrat
General Orientation	Arya Samaji	Roots in the Singh Sabha Movement	Western education, liberal outlook

The Hind Samachar Group of Publications

I will now examine the historical background and the circulation figures of the three major newspapers in Punjab. The first group of newspaper is the Hind Samachar Group. The Urdu daily, *Hind Samachar,* was established in 1948, a year after India gained independence. The newspaper was founded by Lala Jagat Narain, who was also its founder editor. Lala Jagat Narain was a staunch Congressman and had participated in India's independence struggle. He was active in the Arya Samaj movement[7].

As a Hindi daily, the *Punjab Kesari* was established in 1965 with an 'initial print order of 1,500 copies'. By 1975-77, the circulation had shot unto nearly 100,000 copies. The circulation of the *Punjab Kesari* has grown by 12,500 per cent over the period of sixteen years. The *Punjab Kesari*, the Hindi daily published at Jalandhar has the second largest circulation in the country. [8]The *Punjab Kesari* with an average circulation per publishing day of 342,744, stands second to Anand Bazar Patrika, a Bengali daily with average circulation per publishing day at 412,400. According to the 1991 Readership Survey Report conducted by Operations Research Group (ORG), the *Punjab Kesari* is the largest newspaper in the entire North India with readership figures of 4,839,000 and with a total of 10.30 per cent readership of all newspapers. The present circulation of 187,000 copies is the highest amongst all the publications issued from Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh.

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[7]A detailed account of the emergence and the political and social consequences of the Arya Samaj movement is provided in chapter three. Some aspects of the ideology and appeal of the Arya Samaj movement to the urban Hindus of Punjab are also discussed

[8]These are the 1990 figures, released by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

Between 1948 and 1980 the *Hind Samachar* has registered more than 2,262 per cent growth in circulation.[9]

The Ajit Group

The second newspaper group is the Ajit group. Among all newspapers in Gurmukhi published in Punjab, the daily *Ajit* has the largest circulation. It began publication in 1944 and until 1957 it was published in Urdu. The *Ajit* launched its Punjabi publication in 1955.

Dr. Sadhu Singh Hamdard was its founder publisher and editor. He was born in 1918 in Paddi Matwali village, district Jalandhar. He worked for the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and was active in the Quit India Movement (1942) against the British. He was succeeded by his son, Barjinder Singh, who is at present the editor of the *Ajit*.

Two main reasons are given for the establishment of the *Ajit*, first, 'the newspapers in Punjab were feeding the English knowing people of the upper strata of society'. Second, the aim of the newspaper was to cater to the needs of the new affluent class of Punjab peasantry which emerged as a consequence of the green revolution.[10]The growth of Gurmukhi newspaper circulation has implications for the Sikhs, Gurmukhi being the script of their sacred literature. The circulation of daily newspapers in the Gurmukhi script increased from 34,000 in 1967, when the new Punjabi language state was formed, to 79,000 during Mrs Gandhi's `emergency' when

[9]This information is given in the pamphlet published by the Hind Samachar Group.

[10]These reasons are given in the pamphlet on the history of *Ajit*.

the press was closely censored; an increase of 541 per cent in the period after the formation of the new Punjab and the beginning of the green revolution .[11]

The Tribune

The third newspaper group is The Tribune Group. The English daily, *The Tribune,* was the earliest newspaper to be established in Punjab. Its readership constitutes the upper strata of the Punjabi population. It has the largest circulation as an English daily in Punjab and is the only trust managed English daily in India.

It was founded by a Jat Sikh aristocrat, Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia and started publication on 2 February 1881. He was widely regarded as the connecting link between the aristocracy of Punjab and the rising intelligentsia. Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia was born in 1849, the year of annexation of Punjab, in an orthodox aristocratic Sikh family hailing originally from Majithia in Amritsar district. His father Sardar Lehna Singh was a prominent chief of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and in 1832 he was appointed Governor of the hill territories in the Maharajah's kingdom. On the death of his father, Dyal Singh inherited one of the wealthiest estates in the province. His childhood was spent at his ancestral village Majithia where he received education from private tutors and an English governess. In 1874, he decided to visit England to complete his education to the dismay of the elders in Amritsar's landed aristocracy. He was deeply influenced by the liberalism sweeping England and spent considerable time holding discussions with prominent people exploring the causes of his country's backwardness. The young Sardar developed an admiration for the Western system of

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[11]Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India,* p.84.

education. This influence was largely responsible for his philanthropic activities later in his life and also for his persistent advocacy through speeches and writings of English language as the medium of education.

He returned to India in 1876 and decided to settle at Lahore. He became deeply involved in religious and public affairs and became a patron of several educational institutions. He was the sole proprietor of *The Tribune* which he started as an English daily in February 1881 and remained so until his death in 1898. 'No one rendered greater service to the cause of liberal education and progressive thinking in North India in the closing decades of the last century than Dyal Singh Majithia.'[12] He advocated the spread of modern education among all classes of people and was a champion of social reform.

The Tribune was established to achieve specific educational aims. In its early years *The Tribune* campaigned for liberal education with special emphasis on the learning of Western literature and science. It supported English as the medium of learning. 'The paper asserted that all hopes of regeneration of the country, of intellectual, material and moral prosperity, and future glory and independence, depended entirely on the spread of English education.'[13]

S. Dyal Singh's immediate aim to establish the newspaper was to counteract a move to establish a university in which the predominant position was to be given to the classical oriental languages, Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic, and English was to be relegated to the status of a secondary language. Dyal Singh challenged the plan and

[12] P. Ananda, *A History of the Tribune*, New Delhi, 1986, p.42.
[13] Ibid., p.19.

led the campaign for establishing English as the medium of educational instruction. An influential section of the Indian intelligentsia regarded the English language and the scientific ethos of the west as necessary for thrusting India into a new era. Another reason given for this was the dearth of textbooks in the vernacular languages; the few available textbooks were not properly translated. In the first year of its publication, *The Tribune* wrote twenty articles on education, strongly opposing the orientalists for insisting on the adoption of Indian vernaculars to the exclusion of English.

The need for a periodical which would advocate native interests and act as an exponent of enlightened nationalist opinion in the region was keenly felt. Dyal Singh came forward to fill the gap and provide an organ to mirror the impulses that stirred the minds of progressive people, including the youth.

The Tribune campaigned for a united India. In contrast to the British view of men like, John Strachey, who wrote: 'There is not, and never was, an India...no Indian nation, no people of India...that men of the Punjab, Bengal, the north-west Province and Madras should ever feel that they belong to one great nation, is impossible' (Strachey, J , India, London, 1888). An editorial in *The Tribune* declared:

> We do not believe in the theory that India is an assemblage of countries and that her people are an assemblage of countries and that her people are an assemblage of nations. The vast continent from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, and from the Brahmaputra to the Indus, forms one great country, and Bengalis, Punjabis and Marhattas, the Rajputs of Mewar, the Nairs of Travancore and the Gurkhas of Nepal, the Hindus. the Sikhs and the Mohammedans, all constitute members of one great nation, bound together by affinities of language and similarities of manner and customs, and by a community of intellectual, social and political interest..."
>
> Editorial in *The Tribune*, 19 March, 1881

Dyal Singh Majithia bequeathed most of his property to three trusts, one each for establishing a library, a college and the third for maintaining *The Tribune* press and newspaper which he had established in 1881.

Hindi and Punjabi Tribune

The Tribune Trust decided to extend the paper's operations to editions in Hindi and Punjabi in the early seventies. 'The basic aim of the promoters was.....to tap the large reservoir of readership in the Indian languages whose requirements were not being adequately met. The creation of new readership was also deemed essential.'[14]The need to establish these newspapers was also felt because the medium of instruction in schools and colleges and also at the university level at certain centres in Punjab and Haryana had changed.

The *Dainik Tribune* and the *Punjabi Tribune* started publication on 15 August, 1978, ninety-seven years after the founding of the parent paper. The circulation figures for *The Tribune* is more than five times that of the *Dainik Tribune* and more than twice the combined sale of the two other papers.[15] The combined average daily circulation of these papers increased from around 70,000 in 1979 to over 77,000 in 1983.

Readership Profile of Newspapers Published in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh

I will now consider the readership profile of newspapers in order to show the way in which the growth of readership is an index of religious consciousness. The data

[14]Ibid., p.175.
[15]Ibid., p. 184.

below is secondary, therefore, it is not possible to explain why specific socio-economic and occupational categories are employed. The data is used not to establish definite correlations but to provide a general picture of possible readership profiles.

Abbreviations Used
PK: *Punjab Kesari*
HS: *Hind Samachar*
JB: *Jag Bani*
TRI: *Tribune*
DT: *Dainik Tribune*

Table 21

Total readership (in 1000s) of individual newspapers in the states of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal- Pradesh

	PK	HS	JB	AJIT	TRI	DT
Total Readership	2946	126	864	515	778	277

*Source: National readership survey (NRS) conducted by the Operational Research Group (ORG) in 1989.

Table 22

Readers of newspapers in the urban and rural areas (in 1000s)

	PK	HS	JB	AJIT	TRI	DT
Urban	2302	104	308	506	606	173
Rural	644	22	207	359	172	105

*Source: National readership survey (NRS) conducted by the Operational Research Group (ORG) in 1989.

The *Punjab Kesari* has the highest percentage of readership amongst the top three Hindi dailies (table 19). 78.14 per cent and 77.89 per cent of the *Punjab Kesari* and the *Tribune* readers respectively are urban, while 58.56 per cent of the *Ajit* readers are urban (table 20). Therefore, the *Punjab Kesari* and the *Tribune* have largely an urban readership, in comparison to the *Ajit*.

Table 23

Education levels of readers (in 1000's)

	PK	HS	JB	AJIT	TRI	DT
Below SSC*	1775	94	361	550	174	159
SSC and above	584	-	98	147	195	63
Graduates and Post-Graduates	564	17	54	166	408	54

*Source: National readership survey (NRS) conducted by the Operational Research Group (ORG) in 1989.

*SSC is an equivalent of matriculation.

Table 24

Figures for *Punjab Kesari* newspaper

Education	Percentage to total readers
Below SSC	38.4%
SSC	31.3%
Post SSC	30.3%

* Source: NRS-II and Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC)

Approximately fifty-two percent of *The Tribune* readers are graduates. By contrast, 60.25 per cent of the *Punjab Kesari* readers are below matriculation and approximately 63 per cent of the *Ajit* readership is under matriculation (table 21). [16]These results are supplemented by another survey (table 22) which reveals that 38.4 per cent of the *Punjab Kesari* readers are below matriculation and 31.3 per cent are matriculates. This indicates that the level of education of *The Tribune* readers is higher as compared to readers of the two vernacular newspapers.

[16]In the Indian education system, matriculation is equivalent to the senior school secondary examinations.

Table 25

Household income of newspaper readers (in 1000s)

	PK	HS	JB	AJIT	TRI	DT
Below 750	187	2	11	44	11	22
751- 1500	764	26	90	216	111	82
1501- 2500	1002	21	170	350	250	82
2501- 4000	633	46	110	208	255	65
4001	359	32	33	45	152	27

*Source: National readership survey (NRS) conducted by the Operational Research Group (ORG) in 1989.

Table 26

Figures for *Punjab Kesari* newspaper

Family Income	Percentage of total readers
Below Rs. 250	3.1%
Rs.251 to 500	23.6%
Rs.501 to 1000	42.8%
Over Rs. 1000	30.5%

* Source: NRS-II and ABC

A comparison of the monthly income of the readers of the three newspapers indicates that approximately 47 per cent of the *Punjab Kesari* readers earn on an average less than Rs1501. Somewhat similar results emanate in another survey (table 24), which suggests that 42.8 per cent of the *Punjab Kesari* readers have a monthly income between Rs 501 to Rs 1000. 40.51 per cent of the readers of the *Ajit* have a monthly income between Rs 1501-2500, and 25 per cent earn between Rs 751-1500 (table 25). 64.91 per cent of *The Tribune* readers have a monthly earning of more then Rs 1501 (table 25).

The figures above indicate that readers of *The Tribune* belong to a relatively higher socio-economic background as compared to readers of the two vernacular newspapers , the *Punjab Kesari* and the *Ajit*.

Table 27

Occupational breakdown of newspaper readers (in 1000s)

	PK	HS	JB	AJIT	TRI	DT
Professionals/ Executives	62	4	1	26	49	7
Clerks/Salesmen	446	16	56	122	230	59
Industrialists/Traders	580	48	68	81	81	47
Workers	219	6	42	96	12	10
Students	627	-	121	165	226	83
Housewife/ Non-Working	808	45	131	213	137	39
Agriculturist	137	4	92	143	31	28
Agricultural Labour	2	-	-	1	-	-
Artisan	6	-	-	-	-	-
Others	59	2	5	18	13	5

*Source: National readership survey (NRS) conducted by the Operational Research Group (ORG) in 1989.

The *Punjab Kesari* is most popular among traders and industrialists (19.69 per cent, as compared to 0.09 per cent and 10.41 per cent for the *Ajit* and the *Tribune* respectively) , while the *Ajit* appeals to the agriculturists most (16.55 per cent as compared to 0.05 per cent for the *Punjab Kesari* and 0.04 per cent for *The Tribune*). Majority of the *Tribune* readers are clerks and professionals (29.56 per cent as compared to 15.14 per cent for the *Punjab Kesari* and 14.12 per cent for the *Ajit*).

The data on readership profile of newspapers published in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh supports the view that readers of *The Tribune* are relatively better educated and belong to a higher socio-economic background as compared to the readership of the *Punjab Kesari* and the *Ajit*. In India English continues to be the hegemonic language of the national élite. English is the main language of the higher echelons of the nation-wide Indian bureaucracy. The widespread use of English binds the diversified urban middle class and connotes a class distinction. According to Brass, the English language newspapers account for some 19 per cent of the total newspapers in India.[17]

The data indicate that a majority of the *Punjab Kesari* readers are traders and industrialists, the *Ajit* readership largely consists of agriculturists and *The Tribune* is read mostly by clerks and professionals. Although it will be misleading to form an opinion based on this data, it is worth noting that the Hindus are most commonly associated with the trading profession and the Sikhs constitute a bulk of the peasantry in Punjab. This implies that the *Punjab Kesari* is popular with the urban, Punjabi Hindus and the *Ajit* is read mostly by the rural Sikhs.

This conclusion relating a specific occupation profile, notably petty traders, to a distinct religious group, notably the Hindus of Punjab is supported by other noted scholars. In a seminal article, Richard Fox (1984), has examined the historical link between a distinct class stratum of Hindus in Punjab and a reformist Hindu identity. He notes,

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[17]Paul Brass, *The Politics of India since Independence*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.145.

> The peculiar complexion of the Punjab - that is, its caste hierarchy, land tenures, ecology, and religious composition as they had developed before the British and as the British developed them and adapted them and adapted *to* them - explains why a lower-middle economic class having a specific caste and religious composition arose and why its consciousness could be carried by a reformist Hindu identity.[18]

Fox argues that British colonialism in nineteenth century Punjab harnessed agricultural production to the world system without radically transforming rural productivity or capital investment. This led to an expansion of indigenous mercantile interests. Merchants and money-lenders combined to form the growing urban lower-middle class who received their share from the colonial appropriation of rural surplus. 'The importance of Punjabi merchants and moneylenders was in part a result of the much greater commercialization of local agriculture in comparison to other areas of India; and it also developed because the Punjabi high-caste families - mainly Khatri - who became Western-educated professionals and civil servants were drawn from Bengali Brahmin and Kayasth caste categories.'[19]By the 1870s, the urban lower-middle class existed as a distinct economic stratum within the colonial political economy but

[18]Richard G. Fox, 'Urban class and communal consciousness in colonial Punjab: The genesis of India's intermediate regime', *Modern Asian Studies*, 18, 3, 1984, p.485.

[19]Richard G. Fox, 'Urban class and communal consciousness in colonial Punjab: The genesis of India's intermediate regime', *Modern Asian Studies*, 18, 3, 1984, p. 467. Most historians are united in locating the social base of Hindu and Muslim communalism in the urban petty bourgeoisie or middle class. In a situation of economic stagnation, colonial patronage and increasing competition within the urban middle classes for government appointments, educational placing, and political positions in legislative councils and municipal bodies, mobilization on explicitly communal lines made sense - especially as it had real effects on the direction of colonial patronage. Organizations with explicit communal programmes such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League were based preponderantly on the urban petty bourgeoisie, A. Vanaik, *The Painful Transition*, London, 1990, p.143.

they had evolved no ideology, formal institutions, or collective social action by which to safeguard and promote their vested interests. During the 1870's the British introduced canal irrigation in Western Punjab which contributed to this region becoming the chief export crop producer. Further, the Land Alienation Act of 1900 divided the population of Punjab into agricultural and non-agricultural castes, not allowing the latter to purchase land from the former. This was viewed as a conscious attempt to restrain the expansion of the Hindu petty bourgeoisie. The ideology of the Arya Samaj provided the traditional merchant castes[20] who traditionally composed the lower-class Punjabi Hindus[21]with a new, corporate identity.

This digression into history was important to highlight the propensity among Punjabi Hindus to identify with the mainstream Hindu culture and Hindi language rather than with a region or with the Punjabi language. We must remember that the Arya Samaj was an active proponent of this orientation and Hindu opposition to Punjabi was even more strong than to Urdu. We will now examine the vital role of the vernacular press in Punjab in articulating and maintaining religious dichotomies.

3) A Comparison of the Editorials

I now turn to a comparison of editorials of the three major newspapers of Punjab: The *Tribune,* the *Punjab* Kesari, and the *Ajit.* This section examines the role played by printmen in maintaining and consolidating religious identities. The method is of a comparison and contrast of selected editorials of the three major newspapers.

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[20]Khatris, Aroras and Baniyas are the three major sub-castes or *Jatis* of the merchant castes. They belong to the Vashiya caste.
[21]Fox characterises the urban Hindu Punjabi population as being lower-middle class but does not explain why he employs these categories.

Since the editorials are written in three different languages - English, Hindi and Punjabi, I have translated the editorials into English for our purpose. The biases and interpretations are mine. This data is further supplemented by interviews with the respective newspaper editors.[22] Editorials are selected on the basis of the following considerations: first, only those editorials are selected which cover significant events in Punjab since the late 1970's. Second, editorials which bring out the religious and political positions, often dichotomous, of individual newspapers are selected. Having established this, let us now examine the response of the *Punjab Kesari* and the *Ajit* with regard to religious and political issues.

I) Editorials on the Akali Dal Agitation

Between 1981 and 1984, the Akali Dal launched a series of mass agitations to present a set of demands to the Central government.[23]

1. The Tribune

Highway Protests, 4 April 1983

> Another unfortunate chapter in the current Akali agitation in Punjab opens today with a programme to obstruct road traffic. Mercifully, according to the agitation leaders, the Akali plan does not include interference with railway communications..........It is obvious that neither the Prime Minister's acceptance of the Akali religious demands nor the subsequent appointment of the Sarkaria Commission three weeks ago has made much difference....... both Mr Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Mr Parkash Singh Badal rightly took credit for having successfully pressurised the Centre to agree to review Centre-State

[22]The advantage of reading these newspapers regularly over a long period of time was a great help. Please note that the statements considered significant are underlined, for the purpose of drawing inferences.

[23]The background to the Akali Dal demands and the political turmoil that proceeded the Akali Dal agitation has been discussed in chapter four .

relations...........The "rasta roko"[24] programme is intended to give a new and concentrated dimension to the Akali confrontation with the Centre.

Negotiations between the Akalis and the Prime Minister, 28 November, 1981

The Prime Minister has assured to examine the constitutional aspects of the All India Gurudwara Act[25] which is to be drafted and implemented, as requested by the Akali leaders. It is surprising that if Hindus and Muslims can manage their temples and mosques by themselves, why should the government be responsible for holding the gurudwara elections? If India is a secular (*dharam-nirpeksh*)[26] country, why are certain privileges given to a religious community and not to other religious communities? This way, the government can be accused of bias towards a particular community. Therefore, the Durgyana temple committee has appealed for the same privileges.

As regards the demand to convert Amritsar into a holy city, there can be no misunderstandings. Why was this issue not raised when the Akali brothers were in power? This demand would otherwise have been easily implemented in 1977. Why was this matter not regarded as discriminatory against the Sikhs before and has only come to their notice now?

As far as the Anandpur Sahib Resolution[27] is concerned, its disturbing section consists of the claim that Punjab is a region where the Sikhs are prosperous (*bol-bala*) and apart from five departments the rest will be managed only by Punjab. Besides, there are so many versions of Anandpur Sahib Resolution, no decision can be made in this regard until it is decided which one is authentic. Until then, how can the government make any decision even if it wants to ?

Now that the Prime Minister has sincerely assured the Akalis that she will consider their demands sympathetically, it remains to be seen how sincere the Akali brothers are to their promise to denounce extremism and not to allow culprits to take shelter in the gurudwaras.

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[24]*Rasta roko* is a Punjabi word meaning literally block the roads. It is an Indian type protest involving blocking of roads by the agitators.

[25]Details of the All India Gurudwara Act which resulted in the constitution of the SGPC are discussed in chapter three, see p. 135.

[26]non-sectarian.

[27]The Anandpur Sahib Resolution is a charter of demands made by the Akali Dal to the Central government. It was formulated in 1973 by Kapur Singh, who was a member of the elite Indian Civil Service and a product of Oxford University. The Anandpur Sahib Resolution is regarded as the source of confrontation between the Akalis and the Central government. The contents of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution have been examined in Chapter 4.

2. Hind Samachar

What we feared has happened, 6 April 1983

The government has conceded the religious demands of the Akali leaders. The Akalis do not appreciate the acceptance of their religious demands by the Central government and dismiss them as fraud. What is the purpose of starting a huge highway protest? This can lead to the extremists having an upper hand over the Akalis and the already sensitive situation in the state is bound to deteriorate.

3. Ajit

An appeal to all sections involved with the agitation, 15 April 1983

Since the day the agitation was announced all the opposition parties have condemned it. According to Mr Badal, the agitation does not concern a particular community but the demands are relevant to all communities. Since the agitation has now been launched we want that participation should be whole hearted. Utmost caution be exercised in controlling the irresponsible elements and the Akalis should refrain from giving provocative speeches or statements which the rival press, the Central government or the opposition parties can take advantage of.

In this regard the statement by Mr Badal that the agitation has been launched for the acceptance of the following demand: the transfer of Chandigarh and other Punjabi speaking areas to Punjab, Punjab be given its just share of river waters, federal structure be implemented, Punjabi language be given the status of a second language in the neighbouring states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi and elsewhere where there is a significant Punjabi speaking population, to protect Punjabi peasants in Haryana and the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh, to free the innocent people arrested in Punjab. Besides these, some Sikh demands have also been mentioned.

The response of the three newspapers to Akali Dal demands is varied. First of all, the newspapers emphasize different aspects of Akali Dal demands. *The Tribune*, maintains that the Akali Dal demands concern the review of relations between the central government and the Punjab state. The *Punjab Kesari* is alarmed at the religious and parochial nature of the demands. An argument against the acceptance of each religious demand is put forth in its editorial. Whereas the *Ajit* emphasises the regional nature of

the demands, with focus on composite Punjabi culture and territory. We can discern a contrast between the *Punjab Kesari* and the *Ajit* in their understanding the Akali Dal demands. The *Punjab Kesari* pronounces the Akali Dal demands to be religious and separatist. It launches a scathing attack on the demands and tactics of the Akali Dal. The Hind Samachar group blames the Akali leadership squarely for aggravating the conflict in Punjab in their quest for personal power. The editorial in the *Punjab Kesari* demands, 'why does the Akali Dal raise separatist demands only when it is out of power?' By contrast, the *Ajit* endorses and supports what it regards to be the Akali Dal campaign for greater regional autonomy for Punjab.

Second, the newspapers vary in their response to the central government's handling of the Akali Dal demands. *The Tribune* lauds the Akali leadership for successfully pressurising the central government to review Centre-State relations. The *Punjab Kesari* remains critical of the conciliatory attitude of the Central government to what it believes are the separatist and religious demands of the Akali Dal. It fears that this would intensify separatist tendencies among the Sikhs. The editor of *Hind Samachar* maintains, 'Whom should the Centre hold talks with ? Failure of the accords to be implemented is because of infighting among the Akalis.'[28] The attitude of the *Ajit* towards the central government is confrontational. The Ajit group[29] is critical of what it regards to be gross mishandling of the situation in Punjab by the central government. It does not support an independent Sikh state but favours restructuring of Centre-state

[28]In his interview with me in December 1992.

[29]These views are of the present editor of the *Ajit* whom I interviewed in December 1992.

relations in India so that the states get more autonomy. It opposes interference by the Central government in the religious affairs of the Sikhs. It regards the Sikhs to be a "quam".[30] Moreover, the *Punjab Kesari* reports acts of terror and vandalism by the guerrilla cadres and lauds the police repression. The *Ajit* reports excesses by the central government and the police - fake encounters, harassment of women by the police and unleashing of terror by the police in the villages of Punjab. Reports like these alienate the population who see an alien government bent on destroying their number as well as their identity.

Third, the newspapers seem to share different political alignments. The Hind Samachar group represents the urban, Hindu community in Punjab. Hindus in Punjab have historically supported a more radical form of Hinduism. The Punjabi Hindus identify with Hindus outside Punjab and seek protection from the central government. In recent years, antagonism towards the Centre for disregarding the interests of the majority Hindu community in favour of the minorities has arisen. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), a radical Hindu party, aims to redress this imbalance. As Vijay Chopra, editor of the Hind Samachar group, said to me, 'The Congress party before and after partition wanted to please the minorities. The government has the responsibility not to displease the majority community.' At the time of the interview, December 1992, the Hindu fundamentalists with the support of the BJP had demolished the ancient mosque in Ayodhya. Vijay Chopra supported this action, 'The BJP is not a fundamentalist party and Hindus are not fundamentalists. The government by giving preference to the

[30]The term implies a cultural and a religious unit as one.

minorities did not concede their just demands and that needed to be taken care of. We have proof that it was a temple and sacrilege to construct a mosque during the Muslim invasions. Nobody seems to raise their voice to protest against the demolition of temples in Kashmir.' He claimed that the government had exploited the issue and justice had been denied.

The discussion above, and an examination of the editorials of the three newspapers indicates that the Hind Samachar group supports of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), whereas the *Ajit* favours the Akali Dal and opposes the Congress led central government.

II) Editorials on the Assassination of Lala Jagat Narain, founder editor of the Hind Samachar group. On the 9 Sept 1981, Lala Jagat Narain was assassinated and on the 12 May 1981 Ramesh Chander, son of Lala Jagat Narain, was assassinated.

1. The Tribune

Foul, Senseless Murder, 11 Sept 1981

> In murdering Lala Jagat Narain, a veteran journalist and an eminent citizen of Punjab, the assassins have provided further evidence of a growing intolerance in this country of published comment which some people find unpalatable..........Lala Jagat Narain was known for his forthright opinions on certain issues, one of which was the danger to communal peace arising from political and religious extremism...........The murder itself is a warning to the two principal communities in Punjab that every immoderate act begins with immoderate thinking. It is necessary that the leaders of the two communities start thinking coolly about the possible consequences of this episode and to take steps to prevent madness from spreading any further. It is also the duty of the State government to ensure that its patience is not misunderstood to mean the lack of ability to put down crime, whether it is committed for personal gain or in the mistaken belief of service to religion or political ideology.

Tears and Anger 14 May, 1984

Tears and anger are invariably joined when killing results from cruel political revenge ....The timing of the crime may, however, be significant, Romesh Chander was gunned down within 24 hours of the release of Akali leaders detained for burning or defacing Article 25[31] of the Constitution.............In view of earlier attempts by some to prevent a negotiated settlement between the Centre and the Akali Dal, the murder of Romesh Chander[32] was most probably intended to forestall the possibility of conciliatory talks to end the current stalemate in Punjab.

A fact which has lately won increased appreciation is the demographic realities of Punjab in so far as these affect the ballot box. Neither the Sikhs nor the Hindus can form a government of their own on the basis of their strength as separate communities. This has been all along evident even after the redistribution of Punjab in 1966.[33] The situation today reflects a much sharper division. Thus the moral is plain: the two communities must come to an understanding which is based on political realities and work on that basis to prepare for the next poll. If this means a future coalition, then so be it. After all, the Congress (I) has not acquired the divine right to rule in every State of the country. It must learn to share power where it must, or do without power as in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir.

2. *Punjab Kesari* *The Lion that passed away*, 14 Sept 1981
Let this sacrifice not go worthless, 16 Sept 1981

Lalaji sacrificed his life for the sake of Hindu-Sikh unity and for the country's unity. He opposed the formation of Khalistan. He did not believe that Sikhs were a separate nation (*quam*), because he saw Hindus and Sikhs as children of the same mother-father and the same Guru. This is why he could not bear to even think of any separation between Hindus and Sikhs. He fought the separatist tendency among the Sikh community tenaciously with the power of his pen.

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[31]Article 25 of the Indian Constitution proclaims that Sikhs are a sect of Hinduism. It therefore, does not recognize the Sikhs to be a distinct religious community. In the late 1970s, the Akali leaders demanded that article 25 be either dropped from the Indian Constitution or be reformulated so as to recognize the Sikhs as a separate religious community.

[32]Romesh Chander was the eldest son of Lala Jagat Narain, who was the founder and editor of the Hind Samachar Group of newspapers. After the assassination of Lala Jagat Narain in September 1981, he was succeeded by his son, Romesh Chander. Romesh Chander was gunned down by unknown men on 12 May 1981.

[33]In 1956, India was divided into various states on the basis of language, but Punjab was left out of this linguistic territorial division. The Akali leaders launched a fierce campaign for the formation of a state formed on the basis of a common Punjabi language. This finally lead to the formation of the present Punjab in 1966.

> At this solemn hour, it would be inappropriate to condemn the Punjabi dailies, the *Ajit* and the *Akali Patrika*, but they seem bent on inflicting pain to Lalaji's departed soul. We want to make it absolutely clear that we have no association with such irresponsible elements. We will not allow the situation in Punjab to deteriorate or to cause rift in Hindu-Sikh unity at any cost.
>
> This could possibly lead to disturbances. Under no circumstances should anybody indulge in actions which could aggravate the Hindu-Sikh harmony.......The stern attitude of the authorities by not allowing any relaxation in the curfew despite persistent requests hindered the funeral procession.

3. Ajit

The sad assassination of Lala Jagat Narain: Well known journalist, freedom fighter and social reformer, 11 Sept 1981

> We had major differences of opinion with Lalaji which we expressed strongly, never allowing `jati' to come in the way. These have dissipated after his sad demise. I favoured Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiat; he regarded this as my narrow mindedness. The statements seemingly attributed to me, published in the *Hind Samachar*, are incorrect and misleading..........It has been reported that incited crowds stoned cars belonging to members of one community.

Response to Lala Jagat Narain's assassination

All the newspapers unequivocally condemn the assassination of Lala Jagat Narain, founder editor of the Hind Samachar group of newspapers. The response of the newspapers reflects the significant difference among them with regard to religious identity and the conflict ensuing from it. *The Tribune* blames the assassination on the growing religious intolerance and those elements who do not favour peaceful settlement of the Punjab problem within the Indian Constitution. The newspaper attributes the present turmoil to conflict over political power between the two principal religious communities in Punjab. Whereas the two vernacular newspapers, the *Punjab Kesari* and the *Ajit* are actively involved in the process of defining religious identities for the Hindus and the Sikhs respectively. The editorials in both the newspapers pronounce their differences on the matter of religious identity. Who is a Sikh? Who is

a Punjabi? Is religious and regional identity synonymous? The rivalry between the two newspapers stems from the answers they provide to these questions, as we will see.

The *Punjab Kesari* blames the murder on those who oppose the newspapers' approach to religious identity. It affirms Lala Jagat Narain's endorsement not to recognise the Sikhs as a separate and distinct religious community. The repetitive emphasis on Hindu-Sikh unity[34] alludes to the Sikhs being part of the Hindu mainstream. 'Eleven years of conflict have not damaged the Hindu-Sikh fabric. Even today Hindus and Sikhs inter-marry, they do business with each other, they share sorrows and joys.'[35]In its tribute to Lala Jagat Narain, the *Ajit* indicates the potent ideological differences between the two newspapers. The *Ajit* claims to advocate Punjabi identity which it feels Lala Jagat Narain regarded as their narrow mindedness. The standpoint of the *Ajit* is to uphold the regional Punjabi identity, while the position of the *Punjab Kesari* is to oppose the recognition of Sikhs as a separate religious group.

The turmoil in Punjab is viewed in a remarkably different way by the editor of the *Tribune*. As mentioned earlier, the *Tribune* is managed by a trust and its present editor is relatively an outsider to Punjab, he belongs to South India. He explains the expansion of the vernacular press to the tendency of the vernacular press to emphasise the divisions between religious communities. His views on Punjab reflected an intellectually objective and secular outlook.

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[34]It is worth noting that the term Hindu-Sikh brotherhood(*bhaichara)* features nine times in editorials on the death of Lala Jagat Narain. Another interesting term used is 'sharing of food and daughter'(*roti-beti de saanch)* between Hindus and Sikhs.

[35]Vijay Chopra, in an interview with me in December 1992.

The turbulent events of the 1970s produced scathing attacks and counter attacks in the Jalandhar vernacular press.[36]In the 1970's an acrimonious paper war broke out between two of the oldest rival vernacular newspapers in Punjab. In response, the state government frequently imposed censorship on the dailies. The matter took a serious turn when two editors of one of the newspapers were assassinated consecutively. Thus we see that the vernacular press has played a critical role in heightening religious identifications in recent years by reinforcing the linguistic basis of religious identity. Consequently, a composite Punjabi identity; shared by all religious communities, has failed to emerge in Punjab. This also underlines the widespread support that the Sikh movement for Khalistan elicited from the Sikh peasantry.

III

Cassettes as Communicators: The rise of Bhindranwale as a cult figure[37]

The reader will recall that in 1992, 49 per cent of the total population of Punjab was illiterate. It is plausible to argue that in the period under consideration, there was an area for media exploitation where the press could not reach the relevant audience. This gap was filled by radio-cassettes which were relatively inexpensive and could be bought by the people in the villages. The humble audio cassette has grown at an

[36]The Punjab press shifted from Lahore to Jalandhar city in Punjab after the partition of India in 1947.
[37]Bhindranwale was a preacher who strictly followed the tenets of the Sikh faith as delivered by the Gurus, enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib and embedded in the rituals. Details regarding his background were discussed in chapter 4.

astounding rate to make India one of the largest producers of cassettes in the world. According to an estimate by the Indian Phonographic Industry, 'India's legitimate and pirate sales together (180 million music cassettes) push it way ahead of China (125 million), UK (83 million) and Japan (59.2 million) to an amazing number two position - right after the giant United States (446.2 million) market.[38]According to one rough estimate, devotional music, folk songs and regional music make up forty per cent of the market, while the lion's share goes to film music.[39]

In *Cassette Culture*, Peter Manuel (1993) examines how the portable cassette player -- a new mass medium - has revolutionised popular culture in India. Manuel shows how the cassette revolution has revitalised local subcultures and community values throughout the subcontinent. He argues that inexpensive cassettes serve to mobilise regional and sectarian movements. Moreover, the campaign of the Hindu radical right has been facilitated by the effective use of the video and audio cassettes. When Uma Bharati, a leader of the BJP, gave a fiery speech on the controversial Ayodhya issue, the speech was on tape and is reported to have sold 1,500,000 copies in Uttar Pradesh.[40]The importance of the cassettes in the socio-political sphere will become salient in the following section.

Paul Brass, distinguished political scientist and a keen observer of the secessionist movement in Punjab, observes that Bhindranwale was not a new phenomenon in Punjab, which has witnessed several local and regional revivalist

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[38]*India Today*, 15 January 1991, p.90.
[39]*India Today*, 15 January 1991, p.93.
[40]*India Today*, 15 January 1991, p.90.

movements among Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in the past century. He remarks, 'If there is anything new in this, it is not the doctrine or the message, but the use of contemporary methods of transmission, notably the distribution of taped messages, to the faithful.'[41]Similar observations are made by Robin Jeffrey, who observes that Bhindranwale expanded his following by putting his message on cassette tapes and through the use of loudspeakers, printed pamphlets and posters.[42]

One of the political implications of such a movement among the Sikhs, Brass points out, is to 'create solidarity and uniformity among practising Sikhs, to turn non-Keshadhari Sikhs, low caste Sikhs, and students attracted by secular ideologies into practising Sikhs and to wean both these categories of practising and non-Keshadhari Sikhs from competing practices and ideologies, religious and political, which might dilute their identity as Keshadhari Sikhs or prevent them from embracing it fully.'[43]Bhindranwale's message preaching that Sikhs remain united and strong enough to maintain their distinct religious identity was particularly appealing to the expatriate Sikh community in England, Canada and America, the socially marginal sections of the Sikh community and Sikhs from lower castes and women. Bhindranwale and his associates moved actively throughout Punjab, exhorting Sikhs to return to the puritanical ways of the Khalsa and baptising and preaching the basic tenets of Sikhism

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[41]Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, Delhi, 1991, p.190.

[42]Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India*, p.92.

[43]Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, p.190. The *kes-dhari* Sikhs are those who maintain kes, or the unshorn hair of the Khalsa, but have not received baptism.

to the masses. They became a centre of Sikhism, propagating the norms and beliefs of Sikhism.

In order to understand Bhidranwale's message and his role in consolidating *Khalsa*[44] identity, I discuss Juergensmeyer and Pettigrew's examination of his rambling and folksy sermons which had a captivating style. It is usual for religious leaders to denounce the evil effects of the processes of modernity and Bhindranwale was not unusual in this. In his sermons, Bhindranwale urged the congregations to weed out the germ of consumerism and abstain from drugs and alcohol, by making religious values central to life. In this regard he said,

> one who takes the vows of faith and helps others take it; who reads the scriptures and helps others do the same; who avoids liquor and drugs and helps others do likewise; who urges unity and co-operation; who preaches community, and be attached to your Lord's throne and home.[45]

Bhindranwale was not an outspoken supporter of Khalistan, although he often emphasised the separate identity of the Sikhs. 'We are not in favour of Khalistan nor are we against it', Bhindranwale declared, adding that the Sikhs would opt for a separate state only if they were discriminated and not respected in India.[46]Bhindranwale frequently used the term *quam* to designate the religious and national characteristics of the Sikhs. Incidentally, this term was employed by the

[44]The term *Khalsa* is derived from the Arabic-Persian term *khalis*, or pure. It refers to the Sikh brotherhood instituted by the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind.
[45]M.Juergensmeyer, 'The Logic of Religious Violence: The case of the Punjab', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1988, p.69.
[46]S.Jalandhary, *Bhindranwale Sant*, Jalandhar, 1985, p. 165. Cited in M.Juergensmeyer, 'The Logic of Religious Violence: The case of the Punjab', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1988, p.76.

Muslims to claim a separate national state of Pakistan. Bhindranwale endorsed the idea of a separate Sikh state only if the Sikhs were discriminated or their distinct Sikh identity was in any way threatened. 'When they say the Sikhs are not separate we'll demand separate identity - even if it demands sacrifice.'[47] Bhindranwale deplored the status of Sikhs in India, 'Sikhs are living like slaves in independent India. Today every Sikh considers himself as a second rate citizen. A baptised Sikh is looked down upon. His handsome look, dress and his observance of Sikh tenets is ridiculed. How can Sikhs tolerate this?'[48]His rhetoric appealed to the separatists who required legitimisation for their political demands.

One of Bhindranwale's main concerns in his speeches was to condemn factionalism and internal disunity among the Sikhs. This is reflected in one of his speeches, Bhindranwale deplored,

> Our misfortune is disunity...We try to throw mud at each other. Why don't we give up thinking of mud and in close embrace with each other work with determination to attain our goals.[49]

He attacked the traditional Akali leadership for making compromises with the Central government for personal gains. In one speech, he quoted a great martyr in Sikh history as having said, 'even if I have to give my head, may I never lose my love for the

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[47]M.Juergensmeyer, 'The Logic of Religious Violence: The case of the Punjab', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*,vol. 22, no. 1, 1988,p.76.
[48]S.Jalandhary, *Bhindranwale Sant*, Jalandhar, 1985, p. 170. Cited in M.Juergensmeyer, 'The Logic of Religious Violence: The case of the Punjab', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1988, p.70.
[49]S.Jalandhary, *Bhindranwale Sant*, Jalandhar, 1985, p. 164. Cited in M.Juergensmeyer, 'The Logic of Religious Violence: The case of the Punjab', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 22, 1, 1988, p.79.

Sikh Faith.'[50]The particular period of Sikh history that Bhindranwale looked back to was the time of the Gurus. Bhindranwale's remarkable ability as a preacher, to quote religious texts and evoke the relevance of historical events in the present time, contributed to his immense popularity.

This section reveals how the revolution in cassette culture coincided with the emergence of Bhindranwale as a charismatic religious figure. By putting his message on cassettes, Bhindranwale conveyed a specific definition of a Sikh. This lead to the dissemination and consolidation of a puritanical Sikh identity to a large section of the population for the very first time. The movement that consequently emerged among the Sikhs, spearheaded by Bhindranwale and his associates, was characterised by religious revivalism on the one hand and a demand for a separate Sikh state on the other hand.

Conclusion

The three major newspapers in Punjab are published in three different languages. The English language newspaper, the *Tribune*, is read by the English educated, affluent and largely professional section of the population, both Hindus and Sikhs. The critical and significant divide is between the two vernacular newspapers, the *Punjab Kesari* and the *Ajit.* Not only are they published in separate languages, the *Punjab Kesari* in Hindi and the *Ajit* in Punjabi, they are also associated with particular religious groups, the Hindus and the Sikhs. The historic rivalry between the two newspapers turned fierce in the late 1970s. This is the period when the movement for a

[50]M.Juergensmeyer, 'The Logic of Religious Violence: The case of the Punjab', *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* 22, 1, 1988,p.78.

separate Sikh state first arose in Punjab and it is the period of our study. The Hind Samachar group, whose roots are in the Arya Samaj movement, a religious reform movement among Hindus in North India in the 1870s, upheld the view that the Sikhs were part of mainstream Hinduism and therefore, were not a separate religious community in its editorials. This was not a new contention, various Arya Samaj leaders had insisted that the Sikhs were part of the Hindu community and a campaign to bring them back into the fold of Hinduism had been subsequently launched. The Singh Sabha movement, a religious reform movement in the 1870s among the Sikhs, repudiated the claims made by the Arya Samaj leaders and aimed at defining and asserting a separate Sikh identity. The Punjabi Press although sympathetic to the Sikhs emphasises the existence of a Punjabi identity which the Punjabi Hindus repudiate. While the reform movements of the 1870s, both among the Hindus and the Sikhs, had already laid the institutional framework for providing a sense of unique identity to the Punjabi Hindus and the Sikhs, it is this rhetoric that marks the confrontation between the two newspapers. In other words, the vernacular press continues to play a critical role in reinforcing the linguistic basis of religious identity in Punjab.

Since the 1880s, the territorial boundaries of Punjab have altered twice, in 1947, when the partition of India took place, and once again in 1966. This resulted in a sharp division between the two religious communities in Punjab, Punjabi became associated with the Sikhs and Hindi with the Hindus in Punjab.[51] What was so novel

[51] A particular language has become associated with a certain religious group very recently in Punjab. This theme is very significant in understanding the crystallisation of identity formation in Punjab and was elaborated in chapter 3.

about the situation that emerged in 1970s was that never before had such a large section of the population become available and responsive to the message and appeal of the press. By the 1970s, the vernacular press and cassettes became foremost in transmitting religious messages which had mass appeal. The printing press now permanently recorded religious controversies and intensified them. In the process, conflicts sharpen, ideas spread and identities are defined as never before. Words on paper harden identities and reflect an attempt of increasingly literate societies to explain their relationships to the governments with whom they have to deal and to the wider world that increasingly affects their lives.[52] Further, the appeal of the cassette culture is an appropriation of earlier forms of oral traditions. It is through the spoken word, which is dramatic, that people develop a sharper sense of their identity, of who they are, they also inform and influence mass opinion.

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[52]Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India*, p. 86.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, I wish to bring together different strands and highlight the implications of this research. There cannot be an adequate theory of nationalism uncritically generalised from the European experience. We need to pay attention to the cultural and historical specificities of non-Western state formation. The historical preconditions that ushered nationalism in India differed sharply from those in Western Europe and the United States. India has not witnessed a bourgeois revolution, nor has there been an industrial or a peasant revolution in India. Yet there has been the development of the formal structure of parliamentary democracy in India.

An examination of the historical and social development of Sikh tradition reveals that despite the evolution of a distinct set of Sikh symbols and a doctrinal discourse, the establishment of the powerful Sikh empire under Maharajah Ranjit Singh, the establishment of an institutional framework which provided the arena and base for Sikh separatism and a separate language and territory, the Sikhs did not demand a separate state until very recently. This leads us to take issue with the view that once an objectively distinct, self-aware ethnic community is formed, then there is bound to be a natural movement for political autonomy. Clearly, the demand for a sovereign Sikh state was not the final manifestation of the historical evolution of Sikh identity. Rather our study explicates the vital factors which in conjunction explain the emergence of the Sikh separatist movement.

Our study has a number of implications. First, it stresses the social base of an ethno-natonalist struggle as vital in determining the outcome of an ethno-nationalist movement. Our investigation of the Sikh ethno-nationalist struggle reveals that the

transition to commercial agriculture induced widespread dislocation and alienation and released a section of the Sikh peasantry for political mobilization. Consequently, it was primarily a body of young, semi-literate men, with rural backgrounds who provided the motor for the struggle for Sikh national state. The classic theories of nationalism are based on a ubiquitous premise that discounts the possibility of ethno-nationalist struggles without a bourgeois or a peasant revolution. The late industrialising societies of the Indian sub-continent have had neither a bourgeois revolution nor a peasant revolution, yet there has been a widespread proliferation of ethno-nationalist movements in these societies. These observations impel us to reconsider the theories of nationalism in the light of two possibilities. First, to account for the possibility of ethno-nationalism without a bourgeois or a peasant revolution and second, to explain those ethno-nationalist struggles which are induced by agricultural change and are spearheaded neither by the bourgeoisie, nor by the intelligentsia but by a section of the disaffected peasantry.

Second, there is the striking coincidence of the late twentieth century ethno-nationalist struggles in the Indian sub-continent with the spread of literacy and a revolution in communication. Although there is a considerable output of literature on nationalism stressing the role of social communications in facilitating nationalism, our study highlights the need to qualify these theories of nationalism in two vital respects. The first is the significance of a vernacular press and oral forms of communication such as cassettes in explaining the timing of a strong ethno-nationalism. Our study of the Sikh ethno-nationalist struggle reveals that the expansion of the vernacular press energised the existing religious communities of written communication. Further, we noted that

cassette culture was vital in promoting the meteoric rise of the charismatic Sikh religious preacher, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Never before in the history of the Indian sub-continent has such a large public become available and responsive to the message and appeal of the press. The striking feature of this revolution in communication is its mass appeal in the regeneration of popular and vernacular culture and in the revitalisation of religious identities, especially to vast sections of the peasantry for the very first time. It is appropriate to note that it is the peasantry - the socially marginalised sections of the population - who have been embroiled in these ethno-nationalist struggles. This stresses the significance of a vernacular press and cassettes in explaining the timing of ethno-nationalist struggles in the Indian sub-continent. Second, contrary to what the classic theories of nationalism lead us to believe, the transformation in communication has resulted in the revitalization of religion and the emergence of sharper group boundaries in the Indian sub-continent. Religious nationalism in India, with all its ambiguities and dialectical transformations has a history of its own, which cannot be reduced to the master narrative of European modernity.[1]

This leads us to another striking inference of our study. Religion remains the dominant social bond that defines the characteristic of the nation in the societies of the Indian sub-continent despite the development of modern institutions of democracy. At the ideological level, these societies have yet to experience a revolutionary break with the past and this highlights the importance of religious ideals and reform for the self-sacrificing passion of ethno-nationalism. The religious context is invoked into order to

[1]Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Berkeley, 1994, p.202.

legitimise these armed ethno-nationalist struggles for the establishment a more just and equitable social order. The religious crusaders come in violent conflict not only with those whose vision of a utopian social order is derived from other sources but also with the central authorities. Further, the violent and hostile response of the post-colonial state to regional demands and the ruthless use of the repressive apparatus of the state to suppress separatist movements provokes armed guerrilla resistances against a powerful, authoritarian state.[2]

We sum up the general implications of our study as follows: dramatic shifts in the prevailing material conditions of existence generate mass discontent in society and unleash political forces. However, in many late industrialising societies there is a tendency to turn to religious notions emanating from religious faith in legitimising economic, political and social grievances. This is because these societies have not experienced a revolutionary break with the past and religion continues to be the dominant world view. This explains the nature and efflorescence of ethno-revivalist movements in many post-colonial states. South Asia today is in the throes of profound structural changes in economy, state and society. These changes are likely to generate more angry young men who may increasingly mount armed rebellions in order to establish a more equitable social order, as both the customary and the modern institutional structures fail to

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[2]Dennis Austin's book, *Democracy and Violence in India and Sri Lanka* explores the paradox of violence and democracy in India and Sri Lanka. His central argument is that in plural societies such as India, democracy further accentuates divisions. The Indian subcontinent is fundamentally divided into majorities and minorities. Conflict is endemic in these situations as minorities reject majority verdicts. This concise and insightful book has implications for our study which could not be considered earlier because the book has been published recently. See *Democracy and Violence in India and Sri Lanka,* The Royal Institute of International Affairs, New York, 1995.

accommodate them. There is every likelihood that revolutionary or reactionary outbreaks will flourish in the future.

Further, the success of an ethno-nationalist struggle will depend in large measure on whether it can find allies within different strata of the population. In the Sikh case, we noted that powerful institutional links bind the traditional Sikh leadership and the Sikh bourgeois to the existing political and economic structure. This barred them from supporting a movement for a sovereign Sikh state. Another factor which contributes to the eventual disintegration of these movements is the weakness in the organizational structure of the guerrilla groups. Our study of the Sikh case highlights this point.

Nationalism as it appeared in Europe is a secular doctrine but in the light of the proliferation of nationalisms we are entitled to question whether the secularism of the doctrine does not conceal the religious nature of many nationalisms. Thus, we need to revise Western theories of nationalism in the light of the proliferation of religious nationalisms. This requires a reconsideration of the very nature of nationalism in the context of the cultural and historical specificities of non-European state formation and the persistence of beliefs and symbols as integrative in South Asia.

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